



The Straight Path

Zen Teachings
on the
Foundations
of Mindfulness

Anzan Hoshin

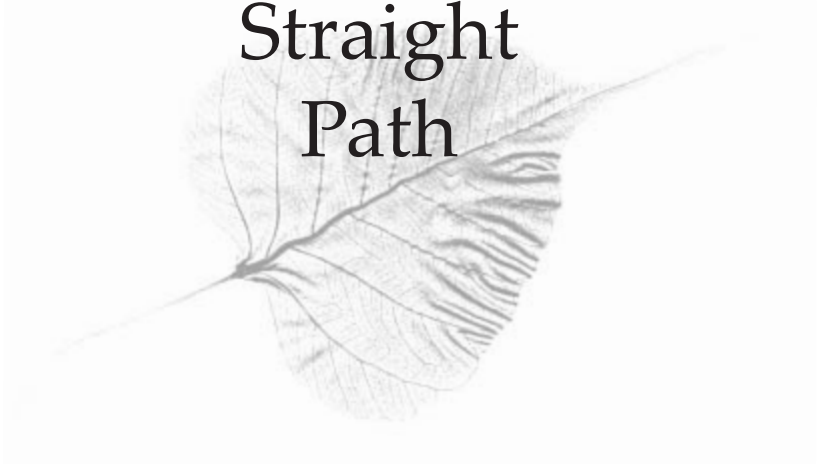
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“Shinenju” — Calligraphy by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi

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Zen Teachings on the
Foundations of Mindfulness

Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi



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The Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi and
Great Matter Publications use non-gender specific
language in order to clarify and make the Teachings
accessible to all practitioners.

CONTENT

Introduction.....	9
Part One: Establishing the Practice	11
BEGINNING PRACTICE	13
Kinhin Instruction	20
Zazen Instruction.....	24
Questions after practice	30
THE FIVE COVERINGS	42
Part Two: The Straight Path of Mindfulness	49
THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS	51
Mindfulness of Body	54
Mindfulness of Reactivity	76
Mindfulness of Mind.....	84
Mindfulness of Mental States	90
Travelling the Straight Path	108
Part Three: Going Further.....	117
BACKPACKING THE STRAIGHT PATH.....	119
The Backpack	119
Snowing on the Straight Path	136
The Direct Path.....	139
The Zero Point.....	145
FUKANZAZENGI: THE EXERTION OF EMPTINESS	148
Appendix: The Satipatthana Sutta	157
Body (Kaya)	160
Images of the Body	161
Basic Reactivity (Vedana)	164
Mind (Citta)	165
Mental States (Dhamma)	166



“Hishiryō” — Calligraphy by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi

INTRODUCTION

Zen is a process of practice and realization that is rooted in the moment that the Buddha awoke to the utter freedom that is the heart of existence and is flowering right now amongst practitioners in the West. The path of this practice has been presented in many different forms throughout many different cultures and times. The Teachings of Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi plumb the depths of the ocean of Dharma and present the essence that is common to all of these developments in the same way that the ocean's waves are all water. The taste of this water is the flavour of reality.

This volume collects a number of instructions provided in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Included are a public talk introducing the principles of Zen practice, teisho (Teachings presented during formal practice intensives for monastics and deshi), and talks from a Dharma Assembly (a gathering for intensive practice by students from all levels of practice in the White Wind Zen Community). Together, these Teachings present the full range of Zen practice from learning how to begin the practice of zazen, to the process of deepening mindfulness into insight through the Straight Path, to opening to the inherent wisdom and clarity of the Direct Path.

Since its first publication it has been used in university courses, at various Zen centres, and appreciated by Teachers and students around the world.

This volume was originally made possible through the efforts of many students and members of the White Wind Zen Community: Anne Muryo Schmitz and others who worked on transcription: Ven. Jinmyo Renge sensei and the late Ven. Shikai Zuiko osho, Michael Zenki Hope-Simpson anagarika, the late Henry Daito Dawe, who did proofreading, and Shikai osho and Jinmyo sensei who did

editing. This new edition for 2023 has been overseen by Nicolas Senbo Pham-Dinh with help from the Sensei and Ven. Mishin Roelofs, currently training as the godo.

The Roshi edited the transcripts for consistency and has expanded on various points. As always, he offers his deep appreciation to all of those who have worked to make these Teachings available to others and especially to those students whose practice gave rise to the words that were spoken. He offers deep gassho-monjin to his own master, Ven. Joshu Dainen daiosho.



Part One:
**Establishing
the Practice**

BEGINNING PRACTICE

from an Introduction to Zen Practice Workshop
(March 3rd, 1990, Zazen-ji)

Most of us have come to believe that we live way up here in the head, just behind the eyes. However, we have fingers and we have toes; we have hands and feet. We have arms and legs. It seems to me that they are alive too, that they are feeling and knowing too. We are alive, all the way up, all the way down, and all the way to the sides. When we look around we see colours, we see forms and shapes. The colours that we seem to see “out there” are actually seen “inside here.” When we begin to look deeply into how our experience arises, what is it that can be called “outside” and “inside”?

Our life does not stop at the neck or even at the surface of the skin; our life also presents itself as everything that we see and everything that we hear, every place, every person, every tree that we meet. Our experience as it really is, as it is in itself, always transcends inside and outside. Our life is so huge, so vast, that it includes endless possibilities. Yet somehow it seems to us as though we live only behind the eyes, looking out at everything that is not us.

Sometimes it seems to us that everything “out there” is very big, much bigger than we are, and so is very threatening. Sometimes we can’t even tell what’s “out there” because everything is covered over and filtered by confused thoughts and feelings. Despite the fact that we are alive all over, we have created a separation, not just between self and other, but between various parts of our own experience. We have a separation between, for example, our waking mind, our dreaming mind, and our sleeping mind. We have separations between how we are when we are by ourselves and how we are when we are

with others. We have a separation between body and mind. There are thoughts that we do not want to have and feelings that we pretend we don't have.

It seems that as soon as one element of separation begins to enter into our experience, there is a chain reaction — and then everything becomes separated.

While we certainly can experience our experience as if it were separate from us and as if we were distant from it, our life still pervades our whole experience. Mind and body are always together in the same place and at the same time. The body is always here, and this “here” is where our life always is.

Twenty-six hundred years ago, there was a man called Siddhartha Gautama who also found that all kinds of divisions were present in his life. He had been raised in the royal family, and, right there, one has a separation between royalty and everybody else. But in this particular case, he was actually walled inside his palace because his Dad had big plans for him when he grew up and Dad didn't want Sid to get any ideas. He was only allowed to move from his spring palace to the summer palace or the winter palace and, as he went from palace to palace, he was always accompanied by guards who held up umbrellas against the bright light of the sun. He was always shielded from anything that might be unpleasant, separated from the most basic facts of life. The separation was so thorough and so obvious that he didn't even notice it.

One day, however, there was a crack in the walls of his comfort and he actually saw something. He saw something real, something that stood outside the walls. He saw someone who was very, very sick. That was a sight that had been kept from him and so he had never seen illness. Whenever one of his courtiers or ladies in waiting had fallen ill, they had been immediately hustled out of the

palace at night when he wouldn't notice. Thus this sight had a great impact for him. When he saw that this person was sick, he began to realize that he too could fall ill and that illness was a fact of life. This was something that he had never understood although it was actually something very simple and ordinary.

Although we ourselves have probably had at least a few illnesses in our own little case histories, still, when we get sick it is as if something unforeseen and tragic has happened to us. Of course, what is actually happening to us is that our life has happened to us. We go to sleep. We get up in the morning. We eat. We shit. We get sick. We feel wonderful. Things are always coming and going for us and shifting and changing. However, we want to maintain things in a particular way, the way that we think that we should be, and so we do not have room for a lot of things. Thus our life is often an inconvenience for us.

Siddhartha eventually began to see that he had to make room for things like sickness, old age and death in his life. Then suddenly he knew that whatever wall of separation was present had to come down. This recognition was so intense for him that he found that he had to abandon everything that he knew, everything that he had been told he was, all of the names that he had, all of the social mannerisms that he had learned, all of the little skills that he had picked up. He left all of those behind because he had found that they had nothing at all to do with what he saw to be the most fundamental facts of being alive, which is that everything is changing and we never really know what's going to happen. He wanted to find out what was going on and so he left his palace and took off his princely robes. He wandered out into the depths of a forest and shaved away his hair and donned the garb of a sramana, which was a particular kind of yogi in that day

and age, somebody who just wandered from place to place, engaging in various meditative practices.

And so Siddhartha became what might now be called a “spiritual shopper.” He went around visiting different gurus and learned various methods. He was very dedicated in doing whatever he was taught to do because the facts of birth, old age, sickness, and death had made such a strong impact upon him. He devoted himself entirely to every yogic method that he was taught and mastered it very quickly. The methods he was taught were all based on samatha or concentration, and were ways of trying to cultivate and achieve a particular state of mind. Through these he attained states of great concentration, so great that he experienced a bliss that he had never known before. However, he found that, at some point, he would still have to emerge from that state and live his life. He thus discovered that these states of concentration were, like all other states, subject to birth, old age, sickness and death. They came and went, just as everything else does, and so they did not help him to understand any kind of true freedom within the realm of birth and death.

Sometimes we feel very happy, and when we feel happy it feels like we have always been happy. The world is wonderful, the sun is bright, people are cheerful and friendly to us. It’s wonderful. When we are sad, everything is miserable. The walls are miserable and the floors are miserable. Everything irritates us and frightens us. And it seems as if it has always been like that and that it will always be like that. But it is not true. It is not true for happiness nor is it true for sadness. Happiness and sadness are both states of mind and all states come and go.

Everything is subject to change because change is what things are. Anything that we experience is a process of change. It’s not just that change occurs to things. Things

are not things; they are change, impermanence, anicca. Right now you're listening to these words and they are coming and going. As I speak them they are gone. Your hearing of them comes and goes. You look at me and you blink. There are colours and forms; you blink and it goes black. You open your eyes and there are colours and forms again. All of your experience is an experience of change, an experience of impermanence.

Siddhartha found that these particular states that he was learning to cultivate were quite useless in that they did not show him what his life really was. They did not do anything except provide a momentary break from his life in which he could go and have a kind of rest. When he came out of it there might be some aftereffects (something like a hangover) in which he would feel very calm, but the whole process felt somewhat like being drugged.

Finally, after about six years of engaging in all kinds of different practices, including trying to starve himself, trying to stand on one leg for long periods of time and so on, he realized that none of this was of any use to him. In fact, nothing that he had ever learned was of any use to him whatsoever in asking and answering this question, "Who is it that is alive?"

He suddenly remembered that, as a child, he used to walk out into the garden and just watch the leaves move in the wind. He would look up and see the clouds coming and going and then he would just sit and watch his thoughts come and go, watch his breath come and go, watch his experience come and go. Since he didn't know what else to do right then, that's what he did. He found a place to sit underneath a tree, he spread some kusa grass for a seat, and he just sat down there. And he said, "Well, I'm not going to get up until I know who and what this is."

And so he sat in the midst of this vow. He was very

serious, very dedicated to what he was doing, and so when he sat he just sat and he just watched. Through this process of watching, Siddhartha recognized something. He recognized that he was not Siddhartha at all. He was Awake. His very nature was wakefulness, bright, brilliant, clear. He recognized that he was a Buddha.

That recognition and that practice has been transmitted for 2,600 years and it is what we call Zen. That's what we are going to introduce ourselves a bit to this afternoon.

Although this gathering is called a "workshop," please don't approach it as if it were work; it is really just a matter of paying attention to what is going on. Attention is not a muscle. It's not something that you have to tense. It is just noticing what you are noticing, seeing what you are seeing, hearing what you are hearing and allowing yourself to be fully present.

There have been moments of peacefulness and joy at many times in our lives. We usually cherish these moments of great peace because they seem to be just the opposite of the many kinds of conflict, uncertainty, and strategies that we so often find ourselves engaged in moment after moment. If we were to take a look at what those peaceful moments were like, we would find that they usually consisted of very simple things: hearing the sound of rain, taking a walk in the snow, sitting with a friend or someone you love and not particularly saying anything. Those moments of great peace are available to you whenever you allow yourself to just experience your experience.

Peace is one thing, but clarity is something else. Peace occurs when, in a moment of clarity, we begin to fixate on the feeling that arises when we momentarily abandon our strategies. There is a feeling of release which is very quiet, very calming.

Now, what if, instead of just settling into a feeling of being quiet, we used that quality of relaxed alertness to attend even more fully to everything that we were experiencing in this moment? And what if we did that, not just in that moment, but in each and every moment of our lives? What if every time that we saw a separation between ourselves and someone else, between ourselves and our own bodies or our own minds, thoughts, dreams and feelings, we took it down? What might happen when we start to look at these separations?

One of the first things that we begin to find out about this quality of separation when we really begin to examine it directly is that we can't really find it. All that we can find is a presumption of separation. All that we find is a feeling, which might be in the body or it might even be in the sense of the air around the body. When you begin to look at these separations you find that they're not really there.

Our practice is just to attend completely to our experience. You might have heard all kinds of things about Zen. You might have heard gossip about koan like "the Sound of One Hand" and this and that. I will let you in on a secret about koan and stuff: all of those things are simply ways of practising attention and mindfulness more and more completely so that, at some point, instead of just attending to standing up or sitting down, we attend to the subtle movements of the mind, or to how we perceive and recognize our world, or of how our experience arises for us.

All Zen practice is based simply on being where we are and, therefore, Zen is the easiest thing in the world. On the other hand, since we always live our life as if we were separate from each other, from ourselves and from the world, it is also the most difficult thing in the world.

Zen practice is about realizing for ourselves what the

Buddha had realized. One of the interesting things about that is that there is absolutely nothing that we can do to realize what the Buddha realized because there is nothing that we need to do. There is no strategy of body or mind, no action or state, that can produce enlightenment. We simply need to be mindful and to see the ways in which we refuse to recognize our own clarity, the ways in which we refuse to recognize our own unconditional freedom, because of our deeply held conviction in these separations. Zen is about losing our delusions rather than about gaining something from outside of ourselves. The practices that we are going to do are all different forms that we can use to practise mindfulness.

Zen is something that you can apply in many different ways. At this temple and in the Community of my students, we use it to find out for ourselves who and what we are, but of course you can just use it to gain better concentration or to give yourself a sense of rest from strife. You can do all kinds of things with it, but I hope that you might at least entertain the possibility of finding out where your thoughts and feelings are coming from and where they are going.

Further, I hope that you use Zen practice to look into how it is that when you open your eyes there is a world around you.

Kinhin Instruction

You have been sitting and listening to me for a little while now and I appreciate your interest. Zen practice is actually a matter of being interested in your life and so I appreciate your sincerity and hope that what I have been discussing with you has awakened interest in working more fully

with the process of your own experience. Also, your knees are getting sore.

Therefore, we are going to start with *kinhin*, the walking practice. Zen would like us to work with every element of body, breath, speech and mind. Since we can bend at the knees, we sit *zazen*. Since we can walk, we have walking practice. Since we can talk and make sounds, we have chanting practice and, since we eat, we even have eating practice. For monks, there are practices called *shingi* that we do even when we go to the washroom and rinse our hands or brush our teeth because we want to be able to work with absolutely each and every aspect of our experience. My formal students, at some point, also work with sleeping and dreaming practices because what we are practising is our life and the waking state is only one way in which our experiencing arises for us.

Formal Zen practice is intimately related to the most basic elements of our experience: seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, thinking, feeling. No matter what is happening for you, whether you are at work, at home, with a loved one, or on a bus, everything can be an opportunity to practise inquiring deeply into what we are experiencing.

When you are doing these practices, please do not try to make yourself feel any particular way. Just do the practice itself. “Just doing the practice” is a process of seeing all the ways in which you get lost, all the ways in which you make things very complex. All that you have to do is to do what you are doing: feel one step after another, feel the breath, be aware of seeing, hearing and so on.

Our walking practice is called *kinhin*. “*Kinhin*” is a Japanese word which basically means something like “sutra walk.” If you have travelled to traditional Buddhist countries you will have seen people circumambulating around temples and sacred places, chanting mantra or

passages from Buddhist sutras. A sutra is a text which presents the wisdom of the Buddha. In Zen, however, taking a step in mindfulness is itself a presentation of the Buddha's wisdom. Paying attention to your life is the presentation of the Buddha's wisdom. The Buddha realized what it is that is living and who it is that is taking a step. When you take a complete step you are stepping directly into the wisdom of the Buddha and uncovering yourself as Buddha. Whether you recognize this or not will be up to you, but basically, this is the way in which we do our practice. We are not looking around for anything to come and happen to us; we are attending to what is happening.

We are going to stand up and walk around this room, over and over again. The point of our walking practice is not to get anywhere. It is just to take a step. As you take a step, the body moves forward, and as the body moves forward, the room moves past. As you are walking, the wall moves past you, the colours change, the weight rolls on to that foot and then on to the other foot. There is a feeling of space on the sole of the foot as it lifts. And then the heel touches the ground, followed by the sole and the toe. The weight rolls, the room moves past you, you breathe in and breathe out and thoughts come and go. All you have to do during this practice is walk. Feel the step.

When I talk to you about feeling the step, what you might be doing right now is forming an image in your mind of what that is going to be like, in a way to rehearse it. Well, you can't rehearse it because you're not feeling it. However, even when you do feel it, often you don't because you are still rehearsing it in your head. We form an image of taking a step and of "being mindful" of it. This means that your mindfulness is being circumvented by your image of mindfulness. Basically, you are trying too

hard. You do not have to try, you just have to do it. You just have to feel the foot and when you feel the foot, you do not do it with your head, you do it with your foot.

Stand up and feel the “standing up.” Notice what happens when you stand up. Look at all the colours that you are seeing. When you are walking, keep the eye gaze down, just in front of you. You will see the back of the person in front of you and the colours that are present, hear the sound of the steps, the sound of your breath and the sound of the street. Every time that you start thinking about something, just bring yourself back to the feeling of the foot on the floor.

Hold the arms loose at the shoulders and bend the elbows so that the hands are held just above the diaphragm. Gather the fingers of the right hand so that it is closed and rest the left hand open on top of the right. Let the right hand hold the thumb of the left. A little trick that we have discovered here to release tension in the shoulders is to press the thumb of the right hand against the base of the sternum, just where the rib cage begins. Hold the head erect, ears over the shoulders. This posture will help you to contact a sense of the natural dignity of the body and will also allow the body to discern areas of holding.

The kinhin round will begin with a single strike of the wooden clappers held by the jikido or Zendo monitor. Until you hear the strike, just stand and feel the posture, the breath, the space around the body. When you hear the strike, step out with the left foot slowly. Use the left foot because, if you are not mindful, you might step out with the right foot and then you will notice that and bring yourself back. We walk at about the pace of a breath but are not following the breath in particular. We will just walk. Keizan zenji used to say, “Walk like a mountain.” At some point you will hear the wooden clappers strike twice.

This means stop. When you stop, go and find your seat once more. Then we will talk about the posture that we use for our sitting practice. Are there any questions anybody would like to ask right now?

Let's just walk.

Zazen Instruction

People often think that meditation is a purely mental process, something that you do with the mind. Dogen zenji, our Lineage Ancestor and the founder of Soto Zen in Japan, spoke of "shinjin gakudo," the study of the Way through the bodymind. Our experience arises through the bodymind. When we are angry, it is a physical state; everything contracts. When we cry, the breath becomes a particular way. All of our mental states are, in fact, physical states and all of our physical states are also mental states. Thus, Zen practice is not something that can be done with only the mind but is something that you must do with what we call the "single bodymind," or the whole bodymind. In fact, the mind doesn't really know how to do this practice at all, because it keeps wandering off into memories, building up expectations, having imaginary conversations with people that you have never met and on and on. But the body is always right here. It doesn't need to do anything. It is just here.

However, the body has been held captive by these mental states. It has been a prisoner of your states. When you become angry, your shoulders bunch up and the chest tightens, the chin juts out. When you become tense, that tension is being held not only by the muscles but also by the skin, at an epidermal level. When you sit, often one of the first things that occurs is that you might feel many areas of deeply held contraction begin to arise, but just sit.

After a while, the body can begin to recognize how it has formed itself according to these states, and it will begin to correct itself.

When we sit, we pay attention to our experience of the moment. We want to use everything that we can to help us to do that and we also want to make things very simple. In the beginning stages of Zen practice we usually do anapanasati, or mindfulness of the breath. Feel the breath in the movement of the abdomen, be aware that you are breathing because the mind is much like the breath; it comes and goes. Thoughts come and go, feelings come and go, all states come and go. If you are angry the breath will come and go in a certain way and if you are sad the breath comes and goes in a different way. The breath acts like a mirror of the mind.

There is not much harm that you can do to yourself by paying attention to your breath. Because we tend to be very self-conscious and to rehearse what we are doing by building it up and exaggerating it, we can get into knots of complexity with some other practices that can make deepening our practice later almost impossible. However, the breath is just the breath. As well, since you are always breathing, you can always do this practice. You can do it as you go to sleep at night, or as you wake up in the morning. You can always do this practice. It is so simple.

The practice is not to “concentrate” on the breath, but to just breathe the breath. If you try to “concentrate” on the breath, what will happen is that you will abstract yourself from the actual situation. You will create some kind of special realm and you’ll enter into conflict with yourself by trying to screen out what is really just your own life. So, just sit and breathe the breath. When you get lost in a thought, or in a feeling, you have separated yourself from the rest of your experience. So when you have noticed this,

gently return to this moment of breathing in or breathing out. When you breathe the breath you are simply sitting, watching the breath come and go, watching the thoughts come and go. Feel the knees, feel the back, be aware of the colours. Do not try to look at anything but just be aware of the fact of seeing. Do not listen to anything but simply be aware of the fact of listening. Feel the heart beating and the breath coming and going. When you get lost in thought or in feeling, just bring yourself back to the breath.

In Zen, we generally attend to the breath through observing the movement of the belly as we breathe in and breathe out. The whole area of the belly is called the hara and the tanden is an area several finger widths below the navel. Tense your stomach muscles as hard as you can; the area just below the tension, an area that you cannot contract, is the tanden. Follow the breath at the tanden.

Some of you who have done other practices might have tried to watch the sensation of the breath at the nostrils, but I do not recommend this because it can produce a vague or “spaced out” sensation. You begin to get a cool, windy feeling and then you might enter into a kind of trance of abstraction in which you are not really attending to the actual sensation of the coming and going of the breath; the breath has become only a concept. Instead, feel each breath rather than the process of breathing. Know the in breath from the out breath. Breathe just this breath.

This is the first time that you have ever breathed this breath. This moment and this breath are all that are going on for you right now. You are seeing, you are hearing, you are alive right now. Being alive right now is all that is going on for you. The breath is a touchstone of the moment. And that is what I would like you to practise.

What is it like when you get lost in a thought? What

actually happens? What is it like when you are attentive to only part of the breath? See what it is like when a dream-like image comes up and what it is like when you come back from that. All that you are doing is seeing what it is like. You are just paying attention, just practising being interested in your life.

Use the breath as a touchstone to remind you that it is this moment. Use the breath as a way to get some of the flavour of your mindfulness of the moment, whether it is very mild or whether it is very spicy, whether it is very hot or very cool.

Sometimes you can be aware of the fact that you are here, sitting and breathing, but at the same time there is a quality of being some place else. It is as if everything is glazed, as if everything has become very flat. You find that you aren't particularly thinking about anything, but are lost in a subtler kind of thought. So notice that and just bring yourself back to the details of this moment of experience, beginning with the breath.

Becoming lost in thoughts or feelings, judgments, stories, memories or planning is known as "wandering mind." Becoming dull or sleepy, lax and inattentive is known as "sinking mind." These are of course the kind of mental activities that you engage in throughout your day and so they have become so habitual that you might find that your whole zazen period is also filled with variations of these. You might feel as if you cannot do the practice because you are always playing out these tendencies. However, the practice at this point is really just to notice that you are doing that and to bring yourself back to what the whole bodymind is experiencing now.

The practice is actually just being aware. It is not really about following the breath or trying to produce some kind of feeling-tone of "being one with the breath." Zazen

is the practice of experience as it actually is. This begins with being mindful, and so you are using the breath to be reminded of that and to show you what your mindfulness is like. Just sit and breathe. Do not try to concentrate on your breath. You are not trying to make any particular mental state happen. You are just seeing what's happening by feeling the breath.

In practising with the body we have the elements of the breath and the posture right here at hand. I've just spoken about the breath. Usually, the body is being held hostage by the various mental states that arise and it acts those states out. In this case, all we want to do is to allow the body to sit firmly and so we take various cross-legged postures.

Let me tell you what Dogen zenji, the founder of Soto Zen in Japan, had to say about the posture of zazen.

*"Sit on the zafu with your legs crossed in either the full lotus posture or the half-lotus. This means you place your right foot on your left thigh and your left foot on your right thigh, loosen your clothes and belt, keeping them neat. Then put your right hand palm up on your left foot and place your left hand in the palm of your right, the tips of the thumbs touching lightly. Find your posture, leaning neither to right nor left, forward or back. Your ears should be aligned with your shoulders, and from the front, your nose in direct line with your navel. Place your tongue against the roof of your mouth, keeping mouth and lips closed. Your eyes should be open and you should breathe gently through your nose."*¹

¹**Fukanzazengi in Progress into the Ordinary: Root Teachings of Zen Master Dogen**, trans. by Yasuda Joshu roshi and Anzan Hoshin roshi, 2nd edition, 1986, White Wind Zen Community. The concluding section of this book involves a commentary on passages from the **Fukanzazengi**.

It is best if you can sit in a very stable posture, such as a full lotus, or a half-lotus, or even a quarter-lotus. In the full lotus, bring the feet so that the line of the toes is parallel with the outside line of the thighs. In the quarter-lotus, just rest your foot on the calf. If that is not possible, then you can use the Burmese or “agura” posture with the legs uncrossed but just folded before you with the knees touching the mat, or the kneeling seiza posture. If you have difficulties with the back or some form of injury to the knees you can sit upright on a chair with your feet planted squarely and your back away from the backrest of the chair. The main thing is that the lower part of the body should be well grounded and the spine upright.

Allow the spine to rest itself in its own natural posture and bring everything into balance. The head rests evenly on top of the neck, ears over the shoulders and the nose right over the navel, so that everything is straight. Feel the top of the head and allow the spine to lengthen. When you feel that the upper part of the body is straight and relaxed, lean back just a fraction of an inch. Feel as if the spine ended in a tail and that you could rest back on that. After a while, perhaps a few moments or perhaps many years, you will find a point, called “balance point.” When you sit in balance point, the upper part of the body feels so light it almost feels transparent, and the lower part of the body is very grounded.

The hands are placed palm up in the lap with the blades of the hands at the tanden. Rest the back of the right hand on the uppermost heel if you are sitting in full-lotus; if you are using the Burmese or seiza postures, rest the back of the wrists against the thighs, close to the body. Put the left hand atop the right so that the first knuckles of the left hand meet the back of those of the right. Let the thumbs touch lightly. So lightly that a piece of paper can slide in

between them but not so far apart that they don't contact. Rest the thumbs lightly, don't arch them up or this will generate tension, don't let them fall or it will be easy to just drift around in your zazen. This is called the hokkai-join in Japanese or the Dharmadhatu mudra in Sanskrit, which means "the gesture of things as they are." Actually, it is a kind of steering wheel that will help to guide your practice.

A good zazen posture is one which helps you to see clearly. When you begin to become lost in a thought, you start to lean into it, and you can feel it as a quality of weight coming up. If you are tense, you will notice that the thumbs are pressing into each other. When you start to sink, or your attention becomes lax, or you get sleepy or drowsy, then the posture tends to collapse, including the mudra, and you can also recognize that as a kind of weight. When you are tense you feel it as a kind of weight. Simply take that weight off and bring it back into the balance point.

As we experiment and look for the posture that we are going to sit in, one of the main things to look for is a way of grounding the lower part of the body and opening up the upper part of the body. Then we can be aware with the whole bodymind.

Questions after practice

So is there anything that anyone would like to talk about?

Question: How important is it to practise with a Teacher?

Roshi: I would say that it is vital. One can meditate perfectly well without a Teacher but Zen is not about meditation. Zazen is only one facet of the jewel of practice. The Dharma is a treasury which contains our own original

inheritance, our own birthright of who and what we each and all are. Zen is about waking up. The whole problem seems to be that we will only see what we will allow ourselves to see. A true Teacher functions as the direct presentation of the Teachings. The Teacher is a mirror that allows us to see ourselves clearly. Interaction with the Teacher and a more and more intimate relationship with him or her leads us to the recognition that there is no one who is the Teacher and no one that is the student. There is only Awareness.

Question: How can I know a true Teacher? I have read about many people who were supposed to be Teachers but their actions have often harmed their students.

Roshi: I think that perhaps the problem was that some of those people were “supposed” to be Teachers. Being a Teacher however is not a role that one acts out for the edification of others or the amusement of oneself. It is a complete yielding of the bodymind into a function, an activity. A true Teacher is that activity. The Teacher is not the apparent personality that provides the ingredients for that activity. The Teacher is that activity and can only be glimpsed by the student through the medium of the apparent personality. The process of practice is fundamentally one in which the student allows herself and her understanding of the Teacher to become transparent to the field of Experiencing so that she can finally meet the Teacher face to face and become herself the same activity that her Teacher is.

The Teacher is not merely someone charismatic or humble, saintly or powerful. A true Teacher allows students to recognize the depths of practice through radically questioning into every element of experience. It does not matter at all whether one likes or dislikes a

Teacher. There really is no way in which we can know someone is or is not a true Teacher other than by testing their Teachings within our practice and meeting them face to face. When it comes right down to it, it really does not matter very much what credentials someone has or does not have. In fact, it seems that many Lineages of transmission have become weakened or even corrupt. Certainly, the Teacher should have received transmission from their own Teacher. However, even that certainly is no longer sufficient in itself. And someone can have the smoothest voice or the cutest eyes or the most luxuriant robes and be no more than a fool. Their personality does not matter at all. What does matter is their conduct and their clarity.

Sometimes a Teacher is compassionate and we can see that his heart is breaking for us. Sometimes the Teacher is a fire and her words and actions cut us to the quick.

One thing that is essential is to be able to ask questions of the Teacher or the senior students about whatever concerns you. Look around you and see what's going on. If there is something that upsets you, perhaps it is meant to. But perhaps you simply don't understand. Or perhaps the Teacher and Sangha do not understand the repercussions of this or that. If you ask questions then you can prevent questions from festering into doubts or you can have the opportunity to clarify something for others. If the organization of a Zen centre is such that you are not allowed to ask questions it is because the answers are too ugly for anyone to face.

Test the Teachings and the Teacher through the practice.

Question: Sitting here...

Roshi: Yes.

Question: I find that instead of just sitting here, I find myself wondering how I am sitting and where my head should be and not knowing where my head should be and how my back should feel.

Roshi: Yes. Well, in order to sit here, I guess we have to know how we should sit here. However, the thing is that because we are usually so identified with and invested in thoughts and feelings, something as simple as feeling the foot, feeling the hand, becomes something that we think we have to think about, that we have to judge. We wonder how we should do it and we self-consciously try and place the body here and there.

Now one of the things that happens when one is sitting is that because you are not moving the way that you usually move and doing the things that you usually do and holding the body the way that you are used to holding it, this can become very puzzling. For example, we are used to holding the body in a certain way according to whatever state is present. If we are angry the shoulders are hunched, the chin is jutting forward. If we are not particularly doing anything, often we are just slumped: the spine is curved and the chin is hanging down, the muscles are lax, or when we are eager there is a particular posture and so on and so forth. The body is always felt through the medium of the state which is present because the body is always acting out some kind of state.

However, when we sit we just sit, we are not particularly acting out any state whatsoever. We are just aligning the muscles and bones and the weight of the body and just sitting; that's all. That is very strange for us. We are not quite sure how we are feeling then because we do not

feel a state, which is what we are used to feeling. We might notice some pain in the shoulder or a pain in the knee or pain in the back and we start to obsess on that. We start to focus on that because that is something that we can understand anyway. We understand a pain. And so we begin to focus on that and to deal with it as though it were some kind of a problem. Instead of feeling the whole body, we focus in on the area of the sensation of pain, because then we can have a state about something going on in the posture.

If there is no particular pain that attention can fixate on, then attention will often fixate on something else. For example, you might notice a sensation of lightness in the posture, so then attention will randomly grab on to that sensation and begin to exaggerate it. It can sometimes feel as though the body is being stretched and pulled up because you have taken this feeling of lightness and attention allowed to fixate on it. This is called a “makyo” or a confusion.

I am not talking about something that occurs merely in terms of discursive thought. Rather, I am talking about the randomness with which self-image grabs at experiences, not just thoughts, not just feelings, not just sounds, but subliminal tactile sensations and so on are all usually perceived in a very random fashion.

So when we first begin to sit we can find that many strange sensations might arise: the body feels like it is being pulled up, or as if it were being pushed down, or it becomes very heavy and dense as if the body were made out of stone. Sometimes you are not sure where your head is, it might be around your elbows for all that you know. And sometimes you feel as if you are sitting straight, but I will walk by during the kentan² and correct your posture.

²The round that the Teacher walks to inspect the practice of students.

Often I might just move your posture a quarter of an inch or just pull up slightly, and yet to you it can feel as if you have been swung back a foot or something of this nature. Or you feel that you are sitting straight but your nose is almost directly over your shoulder and so on.

That shows us that what we are usually experiencing is not actually the pure sensation of body but only an image of the body, a concept of the body, our feelings about the body. We simply have to allow that to happen and it will begin to clarify itself.

We might find ourselves feeling stuck. Can we then see how complex things seem at that time? For example, you are sitting and you feel that you are crooked and you are trying to be straight and then you become obsessed with how to get like that. This is just getting lost in thought, this is just a state of confusion that is being brought in to fill up the situation so that there is no room for clarity. If you recognize things are becoming so complex that it seems to be unworkable, just simplify the situation. Perhaps you might just stop for a moment, you could even just let go of the breath and have a feeling of stopping sitting for a moment. Just stop everything and let go of the complexity, and just notice what you are seeing, notice what you are hearing and notice how the posture feels.

When I correct your posture, try to feel what that is like, notice how the collar feels against the back of the neck, how your shirt feels, how the hands feel, what sort of weight is felt in how the arms hang from the shoulders and so on. And then feel what those are like when you get lost in a state, or contracted, or when things become complex, or you start to fold in.

You will simply start to recognize these kinds of things more and more. Rather than having to think about it or wonder how you should do it, you simply begin to

recognize it in a direct and bodily manner. In that sense it is much like riding a bicycle. You learn how to ride a bike by falling off the bike all of the time. And then sometimes you are able to go for two or three feet before — “oh, oh, oh” — but there is a feeling of balance in there somewhere that the body begins to recognize and then can begin to move into. But after a while it is very easy to ride a bike; you just get on to the bike and you are in balance and you do not have to think about it, you do not have to try and do it, the body recognizes it.

Much of what one is doing when one begins to practise is actually a matter of allowing the body’s own wisdom to manifest more and more, rather than trying to control or manipulate things with the mind.

Often we might try to approach Zen on the same terms as we would forms of spirituality or philosophy which involve the mind making the body subject to its will or control because we seem to blame a lot of our states on the body. We will often blame lust, anger, and these kinds of things on the body. How could the body feel lust? It can feel hunger, fatigue and so on, but lust is a purely conceptual confection based on trying to reinvoke some of the strong hormonal effects that rush through the body during puberty. Lust is a habit of the conceptual mind. And yet, we tend to think that the mind is somehow “better” than the body, that the mind is spiritual and the body is material. But, of course, mind and body are not different.

The body is a way of knowing, seeing is a way of knowing, hearing is a way of knowing, feeling with the fingertips, the toes and the knees are all ways of knowing, thoughts are a way of knowing, feelings are a way of knowing, everything that we are experiencing is a way of knowing. Body is simply a kind of mind. Thoughts and feelings are simply a kind of mind. None of them are all

that is going on, they are each aspects of each other.

However, we have only focused on very small components of our experience yet and have tried to build a complete world out of those few components, and so there has been a lot missing. But whatever has been missing has always been there, has always been available to you, you just haven't been using it, you haven't been recognizing it.

Just notice how you might keep trying to use your thoughts and feelings to tell you how to sit zazen, and just let go of that and let the body tell you how to sit. And you will begin to find that the body will pull you out of thoughts and feelings. You will be identified with some particular state or feeling and all of a sudden the body will straighten up, will pull you out of the feeling because it will say, "I don't want to do this, you keep on doing this to me, I don't want to do it, I want to sit," and it will pull you out of the state. So then bodily wisdom begins to manifest more and more clearly.

Question: How long should a round of sitting last?

Roshi: Attention generally moves in twenty-minute cycles of waxing and waning. Of course there is some variation in this; for some people a cycle might be seventeen or twenty-two minutes but the average cycle is twenty minutes. This is why you might notice that you might begin to feel restless and wonder what time it is or feel a drive to fidget about twenty minutes into the sitting period. There is a great deal of variation in the times that different Teachers and different Zen centres will advise people to sit for.

Here at Zazen-ji a round of sitting is thirty minutes long followed by ten minutes of kinhin and so on for two or three and a half hours, twelve hours, seven days,

whatever. Thirty minutes allows you to sit through a full cycle and the beginning or end of another cycle so that you can begin to extend mindfulness throughout the cycle.

Question: I like to sit for an hour.

Roshi: Why?

Question: Well, I don't know. It takes me that long to settle in.

Roshi: As one's practice deepens one might just sit for one or three or five hours in a single round. However sitting for a long time is not the point. The quality of the sitting is what matters. If you do not become abstracted or lost in wandering mind or sinking mind at all, then you can sit for as long as you wish.

Zazen is not really about producing a calm state of mind. It is about practising ourselves as we are.

I would like to recommend that you sit for two half-hour periods with a brief period of *kinhin* in between, rather than an hour at a stretch.

I would also like to mention to everyone that it is important to use each moment of formal practice as fully as is possible whether one is practising at home or at a Zen centre. Walking towards the cushion, sitting down, taking care of the cushion and standing up are all part of *zazen*. Notice what is going on as the sitting ends. Are you eager? Is there a lot of energy that you don't know what to do with? If so, then use that energy to extend your mindfulness further into informal practice rather than just burning it off. Do you feel like you want to continue to sit for longer? Why? Is this greed? Perhaps you might feel that you have "not finished." "Not finished" what? Practice is

attending to this moment openly. If you want to sit longer then just stand up and do some *kinhin* and sit again for a little while. If you just want to stay on the cushion and find that you grudge the possibility of standing up then you have merely become identified with some little feeling-tone of calm and have mistaken that for mindfulness.

I know it must sound strange for me to advise people to limit the length of their sittings, but as I have said, it is the quality of the sitting that counts. Sitting is not something that one does to impress oneself or others. Zen is not about meditation or spirituality or anything other than waking up.

Question: How often should you sit?

Roshi: When you are just beginning to entertain the possibility of living in mindfulness, it's fine to just experiment with it and sit for ten or twenty minutes here and there. When you want to begin to establish your practice then sit for at least one half-hour period a day and arrange to attend whatever sittings at the Zen Centre are suitable for you by starting as an associate student so that you can have access to a practice advisor who can help you to keep your practice on track. Sometimes you might want to sit more often than once a day and that's fine but I think that the most reasonable approach would be to commit yourself to one period a day and then anything else is something that one might do on a day-to-day basis. As one's practice deepens one begins to realize the need to practise more intensively so that one can work more deeply. The function of a practice advisor here at Zazen-ji and at our branch groups and centres is to prepare practitioners so that they can eventually make real use of interactions with the Teacher if they decide to apply to become formal students and are accepted.

The amount of practice varies with the intention of the practitioner.

Question: Is there a time of day that is better than others?

Roshi: Every day is a good day and each moment is this moment. Practice is about attending to how you are. Therefore it is good to practise at the same time every day, to set a schedule and keep to it rather than being guided by your likes and dislikes. If you only sit when you feel like it then you betray yourself because you cut away the opportunity to work with the states that compose your usual motives and orientations. Sit because it is time to sit and you will allow yourself to open past the hope and fear that usually drive you.

In terms of the time of day I think that there is no time of day that is “better” than any other. Sitting in the morning has a different flavour than in the evening. You might want to taste both and make them part of your diet. You might find that your household is quieter and there is more opportunity to practise if you get up an hour before anyone else. Perhaps you find that the best time for you is before supper. Experiment with it for a week or so until you find an appropriate time and then just do that.

Is there anything else that anyone would like to bring up?

Question: Well I just wanted to say that sometimes when I look at the wall, I think that the wall is seeing me. I can't really describe it. It's silly almost.

Roshi: The wall is just there, it is not trying to do anything. The wall is just there, you are just there. The wall is sitting with you. You are looking at the wall, the wall is looking

at you, so just sit there, look at the wall, let the wall look at you. Just sit with the wall. Sit like the wall; just come right back to sitting. (pause)

Is there anything else? (pause) Isn't this fun?

THE FIVE COVERINGS

from a teisho
(March 3rd, 1990, Zazen-ji)

I was asked if I would do a teisho on the Five Hindrances, which are called the gogai in Japanese, and so I guess that's what I'll do this evening. However, I hesitate to speak on a topic such as the Five Hindrances because as soon as I even say "the Five Hindrances," you might think that there is some kind of problem. And, as soon as we think that there is a problem, we begin to look for a way to get rid of something rather than a way of deeply looking into something and becoming free. And this is what our practice of Zen really is: looking into what is present for us now. All of the Teachings are pointing to this and all Zen practice is a process of looking into this.

Bodhidharma said, "Directly pointing to the human mind," and he turned and faced the wall. The whole issue of transmission is one of meeting face to face, eye to eye. Such looking is the whole body of Zen practice: looking and seeing with the whole bodymind as a single eye.

We should understand the gogai, the Five Hindrances, then not as problems but as ways in which we do not see clearly. In fact, although gogai is sometimes translated as "the Five Hindrances," the words themselves actually mean "the Five Coverings." These then are five ways in which we cover over clear seeing and five ways in which we cover over our life. When we are involved in these states we are wrapped up in our thoughts and feelings, textures of confusion, habits, and defense mechanisms.

The Five Coverings are: craving, hatred, laziness, restlessness, and doubt. Hearing this list, we can all find something that applies to us. In fact, I think we may find that all five of them apply to us. Or we might believe that

we are certainly not like that at all. We should be very careful about this. We need to look clearly, and be willing to admit when we are simply pretending. When we are confused, we have to be able to admit it, if we are going to create an opportunity for clarity. As well, if we are confused then we must allow ourselves room to clarify our confusion, rather than just condemn ourselves for it.

None of the Teachings should be taken as a condemnation. However, this is what we will often do. We hear of “the Five Hindrances” and we think that because we checked off this and this from the list, we are somehow disqualified from being able to practise Zen. Not at all. The Five Hindrances are descriptions of how we can open our practice to clear seeing and insight.

The first covering is passion, or craving, or greed. It is a continual wanting, a sense of need that can never be filled and so we keep trying to fill it. We consume our world and consume ourselves with this need, but no matter what we throw into it, we can never fill it up. Nothing can satisfy this craving because it is simply craving, simply wanting by its own nature. It does not want anything in particular regardless of the little shopping list it keeps waving before your eyes; it wants everything, it wants to want. The antidote for this craving is equanimity, which means clearly recognizing that the things we like and want and the things that we dislike and do not want, are basically the same. They are all absolutely equal.

We can walk down the street and see people that we like and people that we don't like. We see people that we think look nice, people that we find sexually attractive, and people who just do not qualify, people who do not fit all of the signs that we have for likeable people. If we can observe this picking and choosing then we can see that these people that we like and dislike are all equally people.

They are equally real, they all have eyes and ears and noses, feet and hands and fingers, thoughts and feelings. And each of them has a shadow where they stand. Each of them stands out and is equally real.

When we look at the things that we want and don't want, we find that they are all things. We find also that they all equally come and go. If we look clearly, we also find that they all arise within Awareness; all of them are simply the display of Awareness itself. All of the things that are arising within our life are the activity of this life. All equally arise there. When we start to realize this, we start to move easily past the craving and to realize that, no matter how much we might crave, there is nothing that we can have because there is nothing which is apart from us. We arise within the seamless display of things as they are, or Suchness. Suchness is the realm in which each thing is what all things are and all things display themselves as each thing. Dogen zenji calls this the *genjokoan*: the primordial presencing of reality. When we realize this, we put an end to craving.

The second covering is hatred or anger. It is the flip side of craving. There are many things that we want, but there are also many things that we don't want. There are feelings that we do not want to feel, situations that we do not want to find ourselves in, things which threaten us, or make us feel exposed. We hate that. We also hate anything that stands in our way. We might not know where we are going but if we feel blocked, we meet that with hatred. The remedy for hatred is compassion. When you hate someone or feel angry towards someone, your world tightens into a knot, and that someone is held at the core of the knot. You focus just on their face, not really seeing their bodies, nor the space around them. You do not feel your own body, you are not aware of where you are, and neither are you alive to your own seeing and hearing, or your own

thoughts and feelings. You just focus on this other as "Other." You focus on this person as an object and in that focussing you cover over the vastness of your experience. When we begin to see that other person as they are, when we begin to look into their eyes instead of looking at their face, then we begin to observe them clearly. When we allow ourselves to meet them, the knot of anger is released. Meeting each other openly is the true compassionate heart.

Of course the radical remedy would be to ask ourselves what are we actually angry about? We are angry at this person, but is there really anyone there? Is there anyone to be angry at? We look and there are colours. We reach out and we feel this person's face, but what we feel is a feeling. What does it refer to? What is it that is feeling it? When we begin to question our experience as it is, then everything opens and there is no room for anger.

The third covering is laziness, sloth, or torpor. Unlike craving or hatred which are both directed outwards, laziness is a folding inwards, sliding deep into the swampy lowlands of our own lives. Laziness is not wanting to be pulled out, not wanting to be brought out, not wanting to be exposed or bothered at all. We just want to go back to sleep, to drift in our dreams. The antidote to laziness is to recognize the exertion of things as they are. It is to step out past laziness, past hesitation and expose ourselves to the dynamic vividness of our life as it is: the coming and going of thoughts and feelings, forms, sounds and colours arising and blossoming like flowers. By recognizing the dignity of our experience, the vibrancy of our experience as it is, we come alive. The remedy is to recognize that there is nothing but this life and that all possible states are simply small vantage points and the coming and going within this vast living. It is to realize that which is living each and every one of you, and to know that this is Buddha. To completely

know that this field of knowing is only vast brilliance.

The fourth covering is the flipside of laziness. It is restlessness, that endless fidgeting of the mind, an endless searching for something. Restlessness is the activity of that craving, of that hatred, of that rolling over and over in laziness. Restlessness is devious and shifty. It cannot just be where it is but always leaps back and forth into memory and expectation. It worries endlessly, gnawing at its own belly. The antidote to restlessness is to abide always in the samadhi of things as they are, where each thing comes and goes, each thing is impermanent, each thing rises and falls without cease. When we begin to recognize this, we find that there is nowhere for us to go. There is no need to fidget, no need for restlessness because we are always abiding in the ceaseless exertion of Space, Activity and Knowing as this moment of experience³.

Thoughts and feelings, sights and sounds and experiences, all rise and fall like waves on the ocean, like currents in the tidal streams of the seas. But from the point of view of the ocean, there is just water moving within water, there is just ocean. There is no movement, only water. Thoughts and feelings, sights and sounds and experiences rising and falling are just the Activity of Knowing moving within Knowing as Space. It is Awareness moving within Awareness.

³Space, Activity and Knowing or SAKN: three basic facets of how various realms of experience presence that are explored by formal students of Anzan Hoshin roshi in advanced practice. SAKN is a presentation of shikantaza and sagara-mudra samadhi in contemporary terminology that draws not only from traditional Soto Zen and Hua-yen, but from phenomenology and the cognitive sciences as well, in order to delineate the threads of basic issues of practice that must be made clear to the practitioner in order for her to open the waking, sleeping, and dreaming states equally into the expanse of the Awareness in which they arise.

The fifth covering is doubt. To doubt the way that things are, to doubt oneself, to doubt what one knows to be true. We know that there is only this moment. We know that we are alive (even if we don't yet know what life in itself is). We know that this bodymind exerts itself here and now. We know that there are these colours and sounds and yet we doubt this; we pretend that there is really something else going on — perhaps in the next room — and if we were just able to go there then everything would be fine. But when we open the door and enter into the next room, we are still just here and now. We may open all the doors, walk down all of the corridors, roam the streets, travel around the world; wherever we are, we are always where we are. Right here. And each moment of experience, is always this moment.

I feel that the mood of doubt, of inability, is one of the greatest hindrances for any practitioner, whether she is a beginner or a mature and seasoned Zen student. The mood of doubt runs through and pervades the other motives and actions that lead us into greater and deeper confusion and futility. This is why I felt that I should speak to you about the gogai. It is important that you know that, no matter who you think you are, you have everything that you need to fully manifest your own ultimate freedom.

When we fall into doubt, we fall into confusion, thinking that we are not this Vastness. We think that we are only this thought or feeling. We doubt our own strength, our own capabilities. We doubt that we have any options open to us and we feel trapped.

The antidote to doubt is to recognize our own strength. We recognize our strength by being as we are. This is not a matter of having faith in ourselves, nor in something that might happen sometime to make everything better. It is a matter of having faith in what is. This kind of faith is a quality of open heart. It is a recognition, a heartfelt response to the

dignity of our lives, the recognition that we are Buddha. We call this dai-shinkon, great faith. Our recognition of our own strength might be small yet; it might only be some sense that, no matter how crazy we get, we can still pull out of it, we can still make it through. Or it might be the realization that there is only this Buddha, that right from the beginning, as Hui-neng says, "There is not one thing." Whatever our depth of recognition of the Buddha, that recognition is going to depend upon how much we allow ourselves to recognize ourselves.

The remedy to doubt is to actualize great faith: great faith is the proclamation that "This is Buddha" and that all forms are formless forms. This is the lion's roar of Dharma which shows us things as they are. Great doubt or dai-gidan is seeing all the ways in which we do not live that faith; great doubt is the five coverings. We can be convinced that we can never have great faith, because we take great doubt so seriously. But we must join together great faith and great doubt through great practice, dai-funshi, through exerting this moment as it is.

When the Teacher tells the student the importance of faith, the Teacher is not really speaking about any faith that the student might have, but about the faith the Teacher has in the student, the conviction the Teacher has that the student can link up with and recognize unconditional freedom. We can take our coverings so seriously and wrap ourselves in them so thoroughly that anything else seems impossible. But the Teacher's faith is based on his or her own experience, on the realization of their own nature and the nature of all beings. So when I tell you to practise great faith, it means that I know that you can do this. Just do it as thoroughly as you can. Be as you are beyond all of your limits and uncover yourself completely.

Open your eyes and see who you are.



Part Two:
**The Straight Path
of Mindfulness**

THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS

The clouds move over the earth and the rain falls. The winds grow colder. The leaves burst into colour and then abandon themselves into the wind. And moment after moment our life moves. It is always moving, always coming and going. Although it is always coming and going, it never goes anywhere. Although it is always moving, it is always here. It presents itself as the blinking of the eyes, the pain in the knee, thoughts and feelings, rain and clouds.

Our life presents itself to us as each other and as all things. Our life presents itself to us as everything that we are living, and yet, sometimes we are not even sure that we are alive. Sometimes our lives seem to be dry and brittle things, sometimes they rust. Body rubs against mind, and self crushes against other. When we don't understand the nature of our life, the vast nature of our experience and of who we are, then this simple and fundamental misunderstanding means that all of our actions are out of place and our lives are out of joint.

Whatever is arising within Awareness displays itself and then vanishes. Whatever arises within Awareness arises as a play of Awareness. Whatever arises within Awareness is not what Awareness is, but it is nothing other than Awareness. Because we do not understand this, we can live in a world of bodies and minds, time and space, and we can be cruel to each other, we can be lonely and frightened.

In the **Satipatthana sutta**, the Buddha says,

There is a straight path, monks, for the purity of beings, for stepping past sorrow and crying, the setting of suffering and distress, for finding the right way, for the direct seeing

of nibbana, and that is the four foundations of mindfulness.

We could go on and on with an endless litany of the various kinds of suffering that have been caused by our fundamental misunderstanding of our own experience. Open any history book, look at any map and you will see the territories all marked off, one from the other, all the boundaries. Walk down the street, look at yourself in the mirror, attend to the nature of the thoughts that are arising and see those continuous rituals of self-obsession, pettiness, and fear. We could go on and on because this fundamental misunderstanding is a very simple thing, but from it has been built all of the complexity and suffering in which we find ourselves entangled.

The Buddha says that there is a Straight Path “for stepping past sorrow and crying, the setting of suffering and distress.” Some of us may approach Zen practice in order to realize freedom from suffering and to put an end to our patterns of habit and contraction. Others might approach practice in a somewhat different way to find the Right Way, to see directly. Whether we approach practice to end suffering or in order to see more completely, in the end it is the same thing because the only way to end suffering is to see more completely.

The Straight Path that has been practised and taught by the Buddha and his heirs includes everything that arises for us. It begins and ends in each moment of coming and going. The Straight Path leads to the end of suffering through seeing directly into the present moment, through seeing our patterns of holding, and releasing them openly. This is a matter of simply attending and recognizing that which must be released, not through struggling against anything. The contraction of self-image is not an object, not a form, not someone or something. It is simply a pattern

within the mind, a pattern in which attention binds itself in loops and circles of habit and dependencies. By attending openly to our patterns of suffering, we can step through and past suffering and realize the basic purity of our existence.

The Straight Path, or *ekayano maggo* has sometimes been translated as “the Only Way.” In order to understand our suffering, the only way is to see it clearly. In order to end our circles of avoidance, rejection, identification and grasping, the only way is to go straight into them. Everything that we need to walk the Straight Path arises for us as everything that we experience, because the Straight Path is attending directly to experience as it arises.

The **Satipatthana sutta** is one of the most basic and fundamental of all Dharma texts and has formed the basis of practice for millions of men and women for over 2,600 years. It might seem to be quite unusual for a Zen Teacher to pick up a sutta such as this for *teisho* rather than the koan or Teachings that are traditionally associated with Zen.

However, Zen is not just a Chinese or Japanese construction. If it were, then Westerners would forever be able to only circle around the periphery of it because Zen would be merely an artifact of Asian culture. Zen is the transmission and practice of who we are beyond our names, our genders, our cultural habits. It has been practised in India, China, Japan, and now is right here, right now.

As we continue our practice in this seven-day O-sesshin, we will touch upon the **Sutta** and we will discover that what we are doing now is grounded in what the Buddha himself practised in his time. The Teachings of Dogen zenji, Bodhidharma, and all that we can call the Direct Path, is grounded here, in the **Satipatthana sutta**. If our practice is to be thorough and deep enough to

permeate all of our actions and situations so that we can open each moment into the vastness of the wakefulness that we call “Buddha,” we must understand the background and the range of practice. The **Satipatthana sutta** offers us a detailed and clear presentation of how to live in mindfulness.

Please, enjoy yourselves.

Mindfulness of Body

Siddhartha Gautama, also known as Shakyamuni Buddha, founded the Buddhaway and our Lineage of Zen simply by gathering together a pile of kusa grass for a cushion and placing it beneath the pipal tree. He folded his legs, sat down, and began to allow himself to experience this *moment of experience* as it really is. Within our experience things always present themselves formlessly. Experience never has an object. Experience simply presents itself as itself in numberless ways, in numberless shapes and patterns, colours and sounds.

Sitting beneath the pipal tree, he began to wake up to the moment. He saw the grasses around the tree waving, and he saw that each blade of grass was *right here*. Each blade of grass was not over there. Each blade of grass presented itself directly as colour, as movement, right here. Each blade of grass that he saw presented itself within seeing, as seeing.

The evening drew on and the sky darkened, but nothing changed at all, because the darkening of the sky was simply bright and brilliant blue with red, orange and mauve clouds, struck by the light of the sun as it hung at the horizon. Nothing changed because each moment of perception was what it was. It did not lead to anything else.

Each moment of perception was simply what it was.

As he sat, thoughts and feelings appeared, sensations rose and fell, the breath rose and fell and tumbled over itself, but went nowhere at all — it simply rose and fell, came into existence and then existed no longer. He saw that there were moments of like and dislike, moments of attention moving towards something and moments of attention moving away from something. Seeing all of this clearly, he began to penetrate further and further into his own experience. When he had penetrated all the way through, it was no longer his experience — it was *experience*.

When we practise the Way of Zen we do not need to duplicate the Buddha's experience. By attending to our experience as he did, we begin to realize ourselves as Buddha. We begin to wake up to exactly the same thing, exactly the same nature, exactly the same liberation that Siddhartha Gautama did, and that he transmitted to anyone who would receive it. This transmission has been passed down through straight backs and sore knees from India to China, to Japan, to right here and now in Zazen-ji.

The Straight Path is the same for everyone. No matter what our feelings are, no matter what our personality is like, no matter the colour of our eyes, no matter how shady or how glorious our past, the Straight Path occurs in the present moment. The Straight Path is entering directly into this moment of experience.

There are many ways of talking about how to do this practice. Dogen zenji talks about single bodymind and *shinjin gakudo* — studying through the bodymind, and *shinjin datsuraku* — dropping the bodymind. Sometimes I speak of Space, Activity, and Knowing.

In the **Satipatthana sutta**, Buddha spoke of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The **Sutta** says,

What are these four? Right here, monks, one lives

completely viewing the body as body, intent, fully understanding and mindful, having released grasping and resentment for the world. One abides, completely viewing the sensations as sensations, intent, fully understanding and mindful, having released grasping and resentment for the world. One dwells, completely viewing the mind as mind, intent, fully understanding and mindful, having released grasping and resentment for the world. One lives, completely viewing mental states as states, intent, fully understanding and mindful, having released grasping and resentment for the world.

The Buddha addressed this “sutta” or discourse to the monks in his company but it is addressed to all of us as well, and addressed to each one of us specifically.

There is this body, this fact of sitting here, this fact of breathing in and breathing out, these perceptions arising and these sensations. A feeling arises in the knee, in the wrist, an itch behind the ear. Something is tasted and there is liking or disliking, or feeling quite cool about it, feeling neutral. The fickleness of attention grasps at certain things that are arising and obscures others. There is mind and mental states and mental factors.

The Buddha says that by keeping things very simple, by understanding the body as body, intently and actively, without grasping or avoiding anything, but simply understanding the body as body, the mind as mind, the reactions as reactions and the states as states, then we will realize the purity of being, we will step “past sorrow and crying,” and into nibbana. Then we will abide, “completely viewing... intent, fully understanding and mindful, having released grasping and resentment for the world.”

The Buddha sat on a pile of kusa grass, experiencing the world through body, sensations, mind and mental states. He

used the senses, the eyes and ears, the tongue, the fingertips, he used his confusion and his suffering as tools to investigate reality. We, too, are all seated here fully armed, fully prepared, fully equipped. We each have everything that we might need to realize the actual nature of who we are, to realize the cessation of all conditioned experience, to step directly into and follow the Straight Path, wherever it might lead.

Body and Breath

When the Buddha speaks of the Straight Path, he begins with the body. All experience begins with the body, and yet so few of us really experience anything at all of the body unless something dramatic is happening, like sex or a chain saw going through the leg. We so rarely feel anything at all that we find ourselves going to more and more extreme measures in order to feel something. And when we finally do feel something, are we then feeling the body as it is? The Buddha asks you to begin your exploration into your experience, right here, in this posture of zazen. And then, when you stand, to know that you are standing. Not just to think "I'm standing," but to feel the standing. When you take a step, feel that step.

When the Buddha was teaching, he said that the whole subject matter that he presented could simply be stated as suffering and the end of suffering. He tried to keep things quite simple and quite clear. He saw that people had many misunderstandings about their experience and so he tried to correct the worst of those misunderstandings. He saw that people either grasped or had aversion to objects and so he asked them to see the objects clearly, and see that there was nothing in the object to either grasp or feel aversion towards; the object itself was

pure of their grasping and of their aversion.

As the Buddhadharma continued its transmission, many Teachers found that unless other misunderstandings were corrected, the whole circle of birth and death could not be effectively and completely ended for most people. Later Teachers then asked their students to question into not only whether or not there is something to like or dislike inherent in the object itself, but whether there indeed is any object at all, and to ask “What is it that you are experiencing?” Thus, in Zen we say things like *shinjin datsuraku* — dropping off the bodymind, or we say that there is no body and there is no mind, there is no time and there is no space.

In the **Satipatthana sutta** the Buddha tries to correct some of the misunderstandings that people have about bodies by pointing out that it is really much like a sack filled with spleen and liver, lungs and bones and so on. He also points to its impermanence, to the fact that this body will die. This is something that one almost never brings up in conversation in polite society but it is nonetheless true. It is so true that it is fundamental to any mature understanding of what it means to be alive and embodied in our experience of ourselves and each other. This is where we begin as well, but as Zen practitioners we must also ask ourselves “What is this body?” “What is it that is being known?”

It seems that the Buddha was content to allow people to think that inherent to experience is a knowing and a materiality, that which is being known, because his main concern was they begin to perceive and to understand the stainlessness of *rupa*, of that materiality, so that *nama*, the mind, the knowing, would simply release its grasping after these objects. Thus, the basic reality of the complex of *nama-rupa* was not examined. However, if there is a belief

that there is an object, then there must be a subject. If we believe that we can find any kind of object within our experience, then there is still a very fundamental misunderstanding because, within our experience, all that we can experience is experience. We can never find any matter, any substance anywhere. All that we can find are our perceptions, our experiences. Anything else is a theory, a metaphysical concoction.

Dogen zenji and Bodhidharma were not really presenting anything different from what the Buddha had taught. They used the Buddha's Teachings as a starting point, but then asked us to dig a little deeper. Bodhidharma would ask, "What is the body of the body?" Dogen zenji spoke of the "true human body," and "this body pervading the ten directions," "this body, the body of the Buddha," and "this body, the body of all worlds."

To realize what all of these Teachers were trying to express to us, we must begin with the Buddha's presentation to us here in the **Satipatthana sutta**. This is a foundation for mindfulness which can then develop into direct insight.

The **Sutta** says,

And how, monks, does someone here view the body as body? Here, monks, one goes into the forest, to the roots of a tree, or to an empty room, sits down cross-legged and holds the body upright, keeping mindfulness present. Breathing in, one is mindful; breathing out, one is mindful.

The body breathes. It breathes in and it breathes out. Begin with this. Know this moment of breathing. Attending to the breath, attending to the body, attending to movement, attending to sitting or standing, walking or lying down, is attending directly to the rising and falling

of the experience of body. To see directly the rising and falling, the coming and going, the birth and death of each moment, is the Straight Path. So, we begin with this body, we begin with this breath.

The Body Moment to Moment

The **Satipatthana sutta** says,

Thus one lives, completely viewing the body as body internally. One lives, completely viewing the body as body, externally. Thus one lives, completely viewing the body both internally and externally.

The old Theravadin commentaries say that this means that one should observe one's own experience "internally" and then apply what one has discovered "externally," that is to say, to others. Now, without getting into whether or not there really is anyone or anything externally or internally at all, I think that we can apply the **Sutta's** statement in a slightly different way.

In the direct phenomenological experience of "body" there is no division between inside or outside. A pain in the knee can be experienced "inside" but you can also look at the knee and experience the body "externally" in seeing the form of the knee. The internal sensation and the externally viewed form both arise within experience, directly, without having to pass through any kind of separation between inside and outside. In this sense, "Viewing the body as body, externally" means to be mindful of the coarse activities: sitting, walking, standing and lying down. "Feeling the body as body internally"

means to see more deeply into the arising of the body image, to see the impact of the contraction when attention becomes distracted and identified with, covered over by, and entrenched within the objectification of experience.

Mental states are also bodily states; a state of anger can display itself as a puffing out of the chest, a jutting forward of the jaw, a tightening of the breath, a raising of the voice, a narrowing of the vision. Further, even in a general day-to-day way outside of the context of intensive retreat practice, we can notice that there are muscular and skeletal manifestations of distracted states, as well as palpable and tangible contractions that occur where there are no muscles. For example, you may feel that there is a kind of denseness, or weight in the head, or that there is a constriction in the chest. Within the space of experience of body, there can arise forms of concept, strategy, emotion and thought that are just as painful and contracted as a broken arm or leg, or as tension, knotting the muscles over the shoulder blades and around the nape of the neck.

In fact, you will have noticed many such sensations rising and falling within your practice. You will have noticed, too, that there have been times of intense pain that have suddenly vanished. You will have noticed, as well, that there might be discomfort or pain in the shoulders or the back and that it can be quite terrifying, or that it can be tolerable, or that it can be just simply present, all depending upon how thoroughly the pain has been objectified. This objectification of the sensation is like snowballing the sensation until it becomes larger and larger and larger.

“Viewing the body as body internally and externally” means to be aware of the direct experience, the rising and falling moments of the feeling of body, the sensations of body without falling into objectification.

The **Sutta** says,

*One dwells observing the body as phenomena which arise.
One dwells observing the body as phenomena which decay.
Thus one dwells observing the body as phenomena which
both arise and decay.*

Itches, twinges, pains, movements, gestures, taking a step, reaching for a spoon. All of these movements, all of these sensations, all of these experiences of the body come and go. In the moment of reaching for a spoon, there is only one moment and that moment never moves. Each moment displays itself fully as arising and falling. It has no past, no future. It stands forth with its own vividness, its own detail. Each moment of moving the hand stands forth just as it is. If we do not see this, it is because we are not attending to the movement directly.

The **Sutta** says,

*When the mindfulness “this is body” is established there
is just knowing and just mindfulness.*

Moment after moment, whether sitting, walking, standing or lying down, whether practising formally in zazen, kinhin, oryoki, chanting or bowing in the Zendo, whether meeting the Teacher in dokusan, or doing samu⁴, or simply standing and drinking some coffee or going to the washroom, please conduct yourself in exactly the same way. Do whatever is done with bare attention to the rising and falling of the moments of experience. When clarity arises, simply know that it is present. When you feel ragged

⁴The caretaking practice that is an important element of traditional Soto Zen training.

at the edges and as if the bones are wearing through the skin, simply notice those feelings. See them as directly as you can by simply attending to them as openly as is possible. When you notice that you are becoming embroiled in a sensation then, of course, this is not mere knowing. None of the details are clear to you. As soon as you notice that attention has become entangled in this manner, open up around the sensation but do not try to avoid it.

Awareness is the continual fact of experience. No matter what we are experiencing, no matter what we are aware of, whether walking, sitting, standing or lying down, whether waking, sleeping or dreaming, all experiences arise within Awareness. When you are aware of “the body,” what is it that you are aware of? When you feel a pain, what is it that feels it? How can we uncover this? How can we even be able to ask such a question directly without single bodymind?

“Knowing the body as body” is the way for us to begin to uncover the single bodymind within our experience. With this single bodymind you can travel the Straight Path, moment after moment; the Straight Path to the end of suffering, the end of confusion. The Straight Path is the right way to nirvana, or the cessation of all conditioned experience, the Straight Path into Awareness itself.

Please, enjoy yourselves.

Images of the Body: The Internals

The leaves of the sumac tree in the temple garden are becoming bright orange and deep red. The trees are becoming bare, more distinct, each branch standing forth in naked outline.

We attend to the rising and falling moment of each experience, of each thought, each sensation, of each moment of distraction, the turning of attention towards a sound or an itch. Everything is turning and changing. We become more and more naked as everything becomes clearer and more distinct. We might begin to feel very vulnerable. If you do, then simply notice this. Know that the feeling is present. Know the coming and going of the breath, the coming and going of each step, the sensation arising in the knee, the back, the shoulders or the fingers.

Once we begin to establish consistent mindfulness and understanding of the body, many of our misunderstandings of the body will begin to arouse themselves and stir. We sometimes view the body as a place in which the mind dwells. Sometimes the body is viewed as the “property” of the mind, sometimes the mind is viewed as the captive of the body. Sometimes the body is a house of pleasures, sometimes it is a cage of meat. Our understanding of the body and of the bodies of others is deeply cloaked in imagery. Once some quality of actual mindfulness and knowing of bodily sensations is present, it is helpful for us to look at some of these images of the body.

In the **Satipatthana sutta** the Buddha presents various statements and images which are meant to correct our view of the body. Again, he does not ask people to radically question into what the body itself is, because, at this point, he is merely asking people to begin to recognize some of the more obvious ways in which they cause suffering for

themselves and for others through delusion and fixation, and to begin to release those causes of suffering.

The images that he brings up next in the **Sutta** are things which one is asked to observe or to examine, to remember or to recollect. These images are contemplations and thus are not truly components of mindfulness or insight practice. One cannot be mindful or develop insight into these images unless one is mindful of, or has direct insight into, the rising and falling moment of the thoughts of these images.

On the other hand, direct insight, direct questioning into the nature of the bodymind itself as we have in the Zen practice of koan is an insight practice because it consists of bare attention to the rising and falling moments of the wado or “root word” of the koan. In some Zen traditions it is used as a point of concentration, however in our tradition we use it as an aid for the beginning stages of shikantaza. It is not a contemplation. I believe that it is important for us to understand these distinctions so that we know what we are doing.

Many of these images that we will briefly look at now are not as useful to us as they might have been to the Buddha’s students 2,600 years ago, because our understanding of some of these matters is both coarser and subtler than their understanding would have been. We have the advantage of medical knowledge gained through experimentation and surgery and a wider range of information about different cultural associations about the body. However we also have means to dress up, paint, polish, and mystify the body that were unthinkable at the Buddha’s time. A full inventory of the internals of many people alive today would have to include silicon injections in the breasts and cheeks.

The **Sutta** says,

And moreover, monks, upwards from the soles of the feet and downwards from the hair on the crown of the head, one observes the body covered with skin and filled with impurities. Within the body there are hairs on the head, hair on the body, nails, skin, teeth, flesh, muscle, bone, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, bowels, intestines, stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, mucous, sinovic fluid, and urine. If a double-mouthed sack filled with various grains like paddy, hill rice, kidney beans, masa beans, sesame and husked rice were to be opened by somebody, he could discern: this is paddy, this is hill rice, these are kidney beans, these are masa beans, this is sesame and these are grains of husked rice. So, monks, if one were to examine this body upwards from the soles and downwards from the hair on the crown, one would discern that on this body are hairs on the head, hair on the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, muscle, bone, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, bowels, intestines, stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, mucous, sinovic fluid, and urine.

The Buddha refers to the various organs and components of the body here as “impurities.” This is because there is a tendency to try to exploit physical experience in order to obtain states of contraction, absorption, and the sensation of momentary ecstasy or pleasure in order to avoid the recognition of bodily experience as a whole. Nonetheless it is impossible for us to completely avoid recognition of bodily experience as a whole, no matter how hard we might try. We are speaking to someone whom we are trying to impress when bizarre gurgling sounds begin to emanate from the lower regions

and strange smells waft through the air. You are about to kiss someone and then you see the nostril hairs. You kiss them and they have such a terrible taste in their mouth and food between their teeth. And we go for those cherished bodily areas which haven't been quite washed as well as they might have. These are simply some of the facts.

If we focus on the body as being impure, it is a misunderstanding, just as focusing on the body as being an object of pleasure is a misunderstanding. However, it can sometimes be useful when we find ourselves particularly interested in only part of what is going on, in order to balance it with a sense of some of the things that we might be ignoring at that moment.

The Buddha says,

Upwards from the soles of the feet and downwards from the hair on the crown of the head one observes the body.

I would have to add that you should observe that the body is alive from the top of the head to the soles of the feet. That you, this "I," or this mind, is not located any place within the body. It is not located inside the head, because there is feeling, there is knowing, present throughout the body. The body knows.

We might believe that the mind is knowing in itself and the body is merely matter, and yet, we cannot know matter, we cannot find any kind of object. The body is mind and the mind is body; they are aspects of each other. The thoughts and feelings, the sensations that arise from memory and the physical sensations that arise presently both arise as all experience arises, within Knowing in itself, within Awareness itself.

Know that you are alive from the top of your head to the soles of your feet, all the way across, all the way around.

Images of the Body: the Elements

Moreover, monks, one can examine the body wherever it abides, wherever it is held, in terms of the elements and discern that there is in the body the earth element, the water element, the fire element and the air element.

At the time of the Buddha, for many centuries afterwards, and even to this day in Asia, the four elements or *mahabhutas* have been considered to be a significant way of speaking about how forms arise and are experienced. The four elements are also called *dhatus*. According to the **Abhidharmakosa** by Vasubhandu, the word *dhatu* means “that which bears its own characteristic mark” and is thus more of a quality, a description of basic factors, rather than a substance. All forms of form are said to be marked with and derived from the mahabhutas and all four are present in every instance of materiality in varying combinations of dominance.

When one speaks of *pathavi-dhatu* or the “earth” element one means that there is a certain kind of solidity. So in this case there are the bones in the knees and the ribs and the skull. As well, the earth element is the quality of extension, of things being supported so that the body can hold itself up or lie down. Sensations of stiffness, hardness, softness, receiving are all “earth.” In fact, any quality of surface or texture is the presence of the earth dhatu.

The *apo-dhatu* or “water element” is cohesion, the holding together of something. For example, if one were to take earth and moisten it somewhat, then one would have mud and you could pack it. So in terms of the body there is mucous sliding around in between all kinds of internal surfaces. There is the moisture in the mouth and the urine in the bladder, the blood and the pulpy flesh itself, layered

over the bone. When something becomes filled with water it becomes heavier, denser. Apo is any quality of trickling or flowing or congealing.

The *tejo-dhatu* or “fire element” is heat, warmth, and also cold. Intense *tejo* is hot and mild *tejo* is cold. “Fire” ripens and lightens; it is also the fire of aging.

The *vayo-dhatu* or “air element” is the breath moving in and out of the lungs, the oxygen coursing through the blood and the carbon dioxide and other gases also moving through the bloodstream, and the gases gathering in the intestines. The element of air also means the element of movement of these bones and flesh. This warm, living, breathing thing is moving, vibrating with life.

To understand how these elements are said to be present in our experience, we can look into the process of taking a step. The feeling of the foot on the ground is “earth” *dhatu*, the foot feels light as it lifts and this is “fire,” it moves up and then forward which is “air,” the feeling of weight as the foot descends is “water,” and then the sensation of contacting the ground is “earth.”

The **Sutta** says,

Just as a skilled butcher or a butcher’s apprentice, after having killed a cow, and cutting piece after piece of it would lay it out near the crossroads, so, monks, one could examine the body in terms of the elements. Wherever it abides, wherever it is held in terms of the elements one can discern that there is in the body the earth element, water element, fire element and air element.

This means to recognize which element is being sensed at any particular moment through *dhatu-manasikara* or “turning attention to the elements.” For example: When sitting, if attention becomes disposed towards and dwells

upon something, one would first notice if it were nama (thinking, intentionality, fantasy) or rupa (an itch, a sound, a colour). Notice its quality as one of the dhatus. Mental states as well as physical sensations have various characteristics or flavours. In order to be able to attend to the process rather than the content of an event it can be quite useful to notice these qualities, however this should be actually “noticing” rather than thinking or interpreting. Thus, the noticing has a very light, gentle touch that does not hold on to anything. It is really just a matter of becoming more aware of the whole of the event.

However, if we were to name and conceptualize these in our practice as the “earth element,” the “water element,” the “fire element” or “air element” then we would no longer be mindful. We would only be thinking rather than observing directly. Such intellectual analysis of the dhatus is called *dhatu-vavatthana*. Although it is based merely in thought, such analysis can still be very useful for us outside of formal or intensive practice in helping us to have a well rounded appreciation for the nuances and subtleties of the process of experiencing.

There are numberless aspects of Reality within the Dharma. The Pali suttas and the Abhidhamma Teachings contain many categories and lists. The **Prajna Paramita sutra** goes on and on pointing out that this is empty and that is empty, and that there is emptiness of emptiness. There are over 1,700 koan. The Teacher teaches, giving teisho after teisho, dokusan after dokusan. These words are only useful to us if we use them to look where they are pointing. They are instructions rather than theories or speculations or inspiring sermons. However, we can only make use of these instructions when we have some mindfulness of our present experience. We can only make use of these if we can approach the Teachings with single bodymind. Otherwise, the

Teachings simply become information to us, and we are merely pleased or displeased by what we hear because of how they can be brought into the assumptions and convictions through which we define ourselves and our world. None of this has anything at all to do with practice or with realization, with entering into the transmission of the Buddhas and Dharma Ancestors. However, once there is some element of mindfulness, the Teachings begin to make more sense to us.

The more fully that we can receive the Teachings with the whole bodymind, the more completely that we recognize what they are pointing to. They either confirm something that we have experienced or are experiencing, or they point out to us some confusion that we have, or that our understanding is incomplete. Then our understanding becomes richer, deeper and more complete.

Mindfulness of the body is the foundation for all Dharma practice. It is the foundation for the liberation from all conditioned experience. Without mindfulness of the body, without knowing the body as body, without experiencing the body as it is, all of our practice is merely speculation. It is unfounded. It is merely a concept and becomes only another cosmology or story that we can tell ourselves.

The Dharma is the Straight Path, and the more completely that we walk this Straight Path, the more direct that this Path becomes until it is the Direct Path of entering into the Luminosity of Knowing, entering into embodying and realizing unconditional freedom.

Please, enjoy yourselves.

Images of the Body: the Burning Ground

Over these past days we have seen the hibiscus flowers on the side table near the altar open and bloom and stretch forth into the air; now the petals are folding in upon themselves and withering. We have seen days come and go, years come and go, moments rising and falling.

Mindfulness of the body includes mindfulness of the perceptual fields because seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling are all bodily experiences. They are the experience of the body.

When we experience something that is seen or something that is heard, we are experiencing the body. We experience the body when we sit upright in zazen, when we stand in kinhin, when we take a step. Feel the pain in the knees and see into the reactivity that can filter it. Notice how that filter can dull or magnify the sensation. Feel how the pain can suddenly shift and, incredibly, the posture become comfortable, light and easy. Understand how each sensation is a flower of many sensations. Notice that each sensation is known, each sensation arises within knowing it. Just knowing and just being mindful of the arising of this present experience, within the whole Field of Experiencing, we enter more and more deeply into the Straight Path.

The Buddha's discussion of the organs, hairs, and various parts and elements of the body are meant to remind us that it is important to balance our images of the body with our experience of it and to eventually replace the images with the actuality.

This body which breathes and sits, feels joy and pain, is born and dies, is basically food. Certainly it will one day be food for the worms, and it is food right now as well. It is host to billions of microscopic flora and fauna living in the nooks and crannies of the intestines, between the

eyelashes, on the surface of the skin. All of these living beings are being born, breeding and dying and making use of our body's resources as food for their own bodies. The food that you eat in oryoki and that passes through the other end is what your body is. The body does not just extract some kind of "strength" from the food; it builds itself out of the food that you eat. I once heard that Daido Looori sensei, who had been a scientist at one time, had calculated that by the time that you are only 35 years old 17 tons of liquid and solid waste have piled up behind you. From the food that you eat, cells are born and die and are replaced. And so, the food that you see in your black oryoki bowl is you. It is this body.

The black bowl that you are seeing is also your body because it is arising within the field of experience, within the body of experience. These fingers and toes, these bones, this flesh, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, these hairs on the head, on the body, the nails and the teeth, all of these arise within Knowing and are how the world is known. There is no dividing line between the body and the world. They are seamless. All bodies in all worlds, all possible experiences and realms of experience are arising within knowing, within Awareness, but nothing that is known is what Awareness in itself is. The Straight Path leads directly into the heart of Awareness, directly into the unconditioned freedom in which all conditions arise.

The Buddha has a bit more to tell us about the body. The **Sutta** says,

And moreover, monks, seeing a corpse left in a charnel ground for one or two or three days, bloated, blue and rotting, recollect that "this body is also of that nature. It will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And monks, see the body abandoned in a burning

ground being eaten by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, and full of small breathing things, and remember that "this body is also of that nature. It will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And monks, see the body abandoned in the charnel ground, a skeleton, with blood and meat tied together with tendon and sinew and remember that "this body is also of that nature. It will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And monks, see the body, abandoned in the charnel ground, its bones not bound together but scattered in all directions. Here, the bones of the hand, there the bones of the foot. Here the shin bone, the thigh bone, the hip bone, the spine, and the skull, and remember that "this body is also of this nature. It will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And monks, see the body abandoned in the charnel ground, the bones whitened to the colour of shells and remember that "this body is also of that nature. It will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And monks, see the body abandoned in the charnel ground, the bones in a heap, having weathered a year and remember that "this body is also of that nature. It will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And monks, see the body abandoned in the charnel ground, the bones having crumbled and decayed into dust and remember that "this body is also of that nature. It will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

This series of images form the bare bones, so to speak, of a contemplation which was much used in Buddhist Asia. Simply in wandering from village to village in India, one could not help but encounter a stray body here and there on the roads and in the streets. As one made one's alms round to a village, perhaps one would come upon a body every

couple of days and one would notice various things happening. To this day, many Buddhist monasteries sometimes place a skeleton at the end of a corridor or walkway used for kinhin or mindful walking practice. As one takes the three-part step or the six-part step (lifting, putting, placing; heel, sole, and toe), one would come closer and closer to the dangling bones. Sometimes a monk might have a series of photographs which would depict these various stages of the breaking down of the flesh and bones in order to balance one's appreciation of the body, one's appreciation of living. In fact, many monks would go and set themselves up a little place for practice in a charnel ground.

A charnel ground, or a burning ground, was a place where bodies were taken to be disposed of. Sometimes they would simply be left there, sometimes flowers were strewn on them and some prayers were muttered, sometimes they were hacked apart somewhat, sometimes burned. It was a place of death, but also a place filled with life because many beings would go there to be nourished – jackals, hawks, vultures and different kinds of birds. Many “small breathing things” would find sustenance there. Some practitioners found that the charnel ground provided a concentrated experience of life in the world of birth and death. Besides, they wouldn't be disturbed by visitors very often, and therefore, it was a place in which one could really intensify one's practice.

This contemplation can very easily become morbid. It can also easily become some form of intellectual argument with oneself about passion and impurities. Nonetheless, “The body is also of that nature. It will come to this. It cannot avoid this.” Please, remember that.

The **Sutta** goes on,

Thus one lives, completely viewing the body as body

internally. One lives completely viewing the body as body externally. Thus one lives, completely viewing the body as body both internally and externally. One dwells observing the body as phenomena which arise. One dwells observing the body as phenomena which decay. Thus one dwells observing the body as phenomena which both arise and decay. When the mindfulness “this is body” is established there is just knowing and just mindfulness.

Mindfulness of Reactivity

We can understand mindfulness of the body, or *kaya*, simply as mindfulness of the whole realm of experience which is presently arising. This realm of experience arises and is known through the body, and so everything that is experienced has some sensory quality for us. Even subtle mental events seem to have some sensory quality, which simply means that they are known using the language of sensory experience. For example, thoughts are discursive or visual images; they might consist of sounds, colours, smells and so on. Dreams, plans, poetry, even mathematical speculation, all use sensory language to express mental events.

Through the observation of the rising and falling of experiences, it is possible that some of the components of thoughts, images, and physical sensory experience can often also appear within the process of penetrative insight, and even these are at first interpreted in a sensory manner, as some kind of form or colour, or to have some kind of substance. Often one is aware of a kind of shift in which it is as if something has dropped, or as if something has moved. Of course, there is no physical substance there. This is so because the disposition of attention itself has an

almost bodily and tactile quality to it, therefore, we can speak of mindfulness of the body as mindfulness of the whole realm of present experience.

In Zen practice we often begin with anapanasati, or mindfulness of the breath at the tanden, and eventually, as mindfulness becomes stabilized, we extend mindfulness to the bodily posture, to the wandering and sinking of attention and, later on, to mindfulness of the space in which one sits and the space of experience or the field of experience. After some time, one might perhaps practise with a koan. In many traditions the koan is used as a device for concentration. In our practice, however, the koan is used as a tool to deepen insight.

There are so many dhammas, moments of knowing, arising and falling continually that while we might be able to observe an experience rise and fall, we may not be able to clearly discern that apparent objects are only the objectifications of the process of Knowing, because our tendency is to focus on the content rather than on the full process. Sometimes, we might have a direct sense that Knowing itself has no form and no place, but it can be very difficult for us to actualize this because it is very difficult for us to see fully and deeply into the rising and falling of these various moments of knowing.

The process through which an object of knowing arises within Knowing can be seen by attending to the wado, or the “root word” of the koan, and attending to its rising and falling moments within the context of bodily mindfulness and surrendering attention into the whole Field of present experience, through observing and opening whatever contractions of attention might be occurring within the field. The wado is not used as a linguistic trick, nor as a device for concentration. The root word is not something that merely shows us that names are not

experience, that “painted cakes do not satisfy hunger,” or that our language and rational modes of thought are limited; this is so obvious that it is taken to be a given. If this isn’t obvious to us yet then the early stages of our koan practice might be occupied with making that fact experientially clear to us, however that realization is only the beginning of beginning to practise the koan. Nor should it be used as a concentration device or technique to focus upon, as an object in which attention can dwell and abstract itself from sensory experience and then interpret this abstractness as if it had cosmological significance. Instead, our practice is the practice of direct insight into the process of experience itself.

When experience arises and falls, moment after moment, each experience has basically the same quality. It is impermanent. It rises and falls, and it rises and falls within Knowing. Each experience is the nature of Experience moving within itself. Each moment of knowing is Knowing moving within itself, whether one knows or experiences the wall, a pain in the knee, the feel of the maple flooring of the Zendo cool beneath the foot, the autumn air, the smell of the rain, black rage, boredom, fatigue, hearing someone chewing and swallowing, a memory. No matter what experience is arising, it is being experienced. Each moment of experience is only arising within Experiencing, within Knowing, within Awareness, and cannot be experienced outside of this, does not exist outside of this except theoretically.

Each experience is the same as any other. Each is always the display of “Aware Space,” because Awareness shows itself as each object of Awareness, but Awareness itself, like space, is ungraspable. Through inquiry, through questioning, through direct penetration into this moment of experiencing and being aware openly and precisely, the nature of Awareness itself becomes clear to us as we realize

that we are clearly just that.

In our practice, we often use a koan, rather than staying with mindfulness of the breath. Sometimes even a mantra might be used in this manner, or if one is able to, one simply sits, directly penetrating every experience that arises. This is known as shikantaza, “just sitting,” or “intense sitting.” Shikantaza is our root practice and it is the practice in which realization continually unfolds and expresses itself as each moment of practice. It is really the underlying way of practice in Soto Zen, regardless of what branch practice we might be doing at any particular time. The point of a branch practice is to trace it back to the root.

Koan practice, anapanasati, kinhin, oryoki, chanting, and bowing are all intimately related to the practice of shikantaza. Shikantaza is not simply sitting and being vaguely mindful of the body or being mindful of the breath or concentrating on the act of just sitting. Shikantaza is “intense sitting.” It is the direct penetration of all experiences that arise. It is entering completely into the nature of Experience. It is sitting as the nature of Experience in which all experiences arise, play and display themselves freely. It is *jijiyu zanmai*, the samadhi of self-enjoyment. “Samadhi” in this context, does not mean “concentration” as a state of inverted attention. It means wholeness. It means completeness. It means harmony. It means a seamless expanse.

It is very difficult for people who are not yet ripe in their practice to even be aware of the body within sitting. Usually one is aware only of images of the body or bits and pieces of the body. When attention displays itself as an apparent form, there is usually some form of reactivity.

The **Satipatthana sutta** speaks of this as “basic reactivity” or *vedana*. The **Sutta** says, “And how, monks, does one live, completely viewing reactions as reactions?”

When reactivity arises, we must know it as such. It must be seen in its rising and falling moment, and although it sets itself up as a judge of other experiences, it must be known to be simply another experience. It is not even “our” judgment of an experience. There is no one standing apart and judging you, judging these colours and sounds and thoughts and experiences. There is no one reacting. The reactivity of vedana occurs purely habitually as a mechanism of contraction from a presumed centre of experiencing to an objectification of experiencing.

Here, monks, experiencing a good reaction one knows “I am experiencing a good reaction.” Experiencing a bad reaction one knows “I am experiencing a bad reaction.” Experiencing a reaction which is neither good nor bad one knows “I am experiencing a neutral reaction.” Experiencing a bodily reaction which is good, bad or neither, one knows “I experience a pleasant bodily reaction” or “I experience an unpleasant bodily reaction” or “I experience a bodily reaction which is neither.” And so when experiencing mental reactions which are good, bad or neither, one knows “I experience a good mental reaction,” or “I experience a bad mental reaction,” or “I experience a neutral mental reaction.”

Reactivity occurs when we view an experience as a “thing” and objectify it, instead of simply realizing it to be a perception, an experience, a moment of knowing. One judges it as good, bad, or neutral in some kind of way. This kind of habit is so extreme that if we stub our foot on a chair we become angry with the chair, as if the chair were itself “bad.” While this is obviously absurd, we often assume that it is “only natural.” Of course, it is not natural at all, it is quite insane. However, it is equally insane to judge a colour

as if it had inherent within itself a quality such as “goodness,” “badness,” or “neutrality.” The same is true with sounds, smells, taste, touch, thoughts and feelings.

Nothing that arises within the waking state, the dreaming state, the sleeping state, or any of the multitude of various subtle states that can arise when one is opening the patterns of attention has anything whatsoever to do with being good, bad, or even neutral. When we believe that something is “good,” we believe that we can extract pleasure from it or that we can add it to ourselves in order to feel pleasure, or to feel good, or strong, or confident, or happy. When something is “bad” it threatens us. We don’t like it. It impinges upon us. It is harsh. It is cruel. When something is “neutral,” we have no interest in it. We don’t care about it at all because we are just too busy looking for something good and avoiding something bad.

To see and understand that our reactions to objects, events, and people occur basically in terms of good, bad, or neutral, not only describes emotional judgments but is also a useful way to understand the movement of attention as the background of those judgments. When we view a colour as good, or a taste as bad, there is a movement of attention towards or away from the apparent form that is arising within attention, within the realm of experience, within Knowing. When attention fixates towards or away from an object this is the basic impulse or tendency of attraction or aversion. When events are screened from the field of concern and go unnoticed, this is the reaction pattern of neutrality.

There are physical reactions and also mental reactions. There can be thoughts, feelings, moods, or simply textures towards which there is an attraction or revulsion. Since we have divided our experience into “self” and “other” and have objectified these polarities,

everything continues to fragment further and further. This basic dualism leads to many further splits, such as good and bad, happy and unhappy, pride and shame, and so on.

Sometimes, in the beginning stages of intensive practice, we might find that there is much less reactivity present. We take a step, sit, eat, hear, see, and there is much less reactivity, much less judgment, much less commentary. There can be much less of a tendency to identify with “feelings” about things, much fewer associations codifying and enshrouding perceptions and experiences. After being mindful in this kind of way for a while, we sometimes don’t know what to be mindful of. Nothing stands out for us. Because we are not viewing things as good or bad, they can start falling into the third category of being neutral. We then find that our precise mindfulness starts to become vague and flat and dry. We don’t understand that this flatness, or dryness, which can become boredom, is really just a matter of not being able to maintain a lot of our usual associations. Therefore, we fall into a structure in which attention does not discern clearly the rising and falling of moments of experience but instead begins to gloss everything over in order to protect itself from the development of further insight and penetration. It is important to know this moment of reactivity, or vedana for what it is.

When there is a feeling that something is good or bad, when attention is moving towards or away from anything that is arising within the realm of experience, simply know that. Notice it as clearly as is possible and that noticing will become a “looking” and that looking will become a deep “seeing,” a complete knowing. Often, when there is a moment of reactivity we just follow our habits and react against it, and of course, this is not noticing. This is not “simply knowing it as what it is.”

It is important to remember that the precision of mindfulness must always be balanced so that we are not focusing and contracting around what we are attending to. We must see what is arising within the whole field of experience rather than focus on something that is regarded as a problem in order to get rid of it. Instead, we must just attend openly and directly. We must simply know it as it is.

The **Sutta** continues,

Thus one lives, completely viewing reactions as reactions, internally. One lives completely viewing reactions as reactions, externally. Thus one lives completely viewing reactions as reactions both internally and externally. One dwells observing reactions as phenomena which arise. One dwells observing reactions as phenomena which decay. Thus one dwells observing reactions as phenomena which both arise and decay. When the mindfulness 'this is reactivity' is established, there is just knowing and just mindfulness.

When reactivity is known as it is, then there is mindfulness of that and this contributes to, or is part of "just knowing" and "just mindfulness." This is not just a general mindfulness that just skims over the surface. It is an all-pervading and effortless mindfulness which deepens itself and becomes more precise as each moment of experience is seen more and more clearly in its rising and falling moment; and as the different components of experience are understood more fully, the structures that we have been hiding in begin to open.

Please enjoy yourselves.

Mindfulness of Mind

The third foundation is mindfulness of mind or citta. This phrase does not mean what a Zen practitioner or Teacher might mean.

One does not hear very much about Knowing or Awareness in the Pali suttas and the Theravadin **Abhidhamma** because there is not really that much that one can say. However, what they do say is that there is only nama-rupa, or name and form. "Name" in this case means "that which names," "that which knows." So, there is knowing or nama and objects of knowing or rupa. In that tradition, it is pointed out that anything that one experiences is an object of knowledge: it is materiality, or form, which is being known, and so, the colour which is seen is a form (rupa) which is known, and the consciousness of seeing the colour, the mind-moment of seeing the colour, is the functioning (nama) of the mind.

They also believe that within what they call the three mundane worlds or the triloka, the mundane realms of desire, form and formlessness, one can only be aware in terms of subject and object. However, through insight into the rising and falling of the process of nama-rupa, one sees into the unconditioned, into the Unborn, into nibbana, or the cessation of all conditions, which is seeing into Knowing itself. While the Pali tradition would not say that in that way, it does firmly state that Knowing itself has no form, no place, and therefore cannot be known; this is another way of saying it that tries to avoid saying anything for fear that Knowing would then be objectified as a kind of eternal thing or soul or self. This is why it is not spoken of very much.

Later traditions such as the Mahamudra, the Dzogchen,

Chan, Zen, the Tientai, the Huayen and so on, do speak of Awareness itself, or Buddhahood, or Knowing in itself. The earlier traditions do not, not because one cannot accurately describe Knowing in itself, but because if we are not careful we will simply continue the process of objectification, believing that there are only forms which are known.

The point of practice is sometimes understood as to stop knowing forms, because it is the knowing of forms that gives rise to suffering. This kind of misunderstanding leads to the belief that Knowing in itself can only be known when objects, forms, experiences, moments of knowing, are no longer rising at all. This kind of orientation can very easily evolve into concentration practices, in which one is merely cultivating deeply refined states of abstraction from sensory and cognitive experiences.

Mindfulness of mind in the **Satipatthana sutta** does not mean exactly the same thing as it would in the Mahamudra, Dzogchen, or the Zen schools. Mindfulness of mind in that context, and in the context in which I teach, means to abide within the process of Knowing. While this is actually what the **Satipatthana sutta** teaches as well, the terminology differs.

The term “mindfulness of mind” is used in a very general way in the **Sutta**. The Pali word is “citta,” which can mean just “consciousness” or “mind.” In this context, mindfulness of mind means something like, “So, how is your mind?” or “What’s happening?”

The **Sutta** says,

And how, monks, does one live completely viewing mind as mind? Here, monks, one knows the greedy mind as greedy, and one knows a mind without greed as without greed. One knows a hating mind as hateful and a mind without hate as without hate. One knows a confused mind

as confused, and an unconfused mind as without confusion. One knows a sinking mind as sinking, and a scattered mind as scattered. One knows a mind that is open as open. One knows a mind that is contracted as contracted. One knows a mind that is limited as limited and an unlimited mind as unlimited. One knows a concentrated mind as concentrated and an unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated. One knows a free mind as free and an unfree mind as without freedom.

Mindfulness of mind, in this context, means being aware of the different states, the different moods, which are arising. From the mindfulness of kaya or body and the rising and falling of moments of the breath, of sitting, of standing, of walking, of lying down, of going forward and of going back, of carrying the robes and bowl, to mindfulness of reactivity or sensation, vedana, the Buddha now invites practitioners to be aware of the kinds of states that they get into; to see that sometimes the mind is greedy, or lustful, or hating and sometimes it is not. All that one is asked to do is to simply know that, to recognize that.

In the traditional commentaries, this greedy or hating mind is said to be “consciousness with greed” or “consciousness with hate.” This means that one’s consciousness, the process of knowing, is at that time intimately tied to hatefulness or to greed. Therefore, it seems to the person that greed or hate is inseparable from one’s knowing; it seems necessary, or inherent. At the moment when you are extremely angry, full of a black rage, or just desperately wanting something, these states seem to be who you are. At that time, they seem to be necessary, to be completely convincing; they seem to be what the mind is.

However, the Buddha asks you to just pay attention and you will see that sometimes there is a greedy mind, and sometimes there isn't; sometimes there is a hating mind, and sometimes there isn't. Know the differences between one state and another and see that none of the states, none of the moods are permanent; they are all just rising and falling and shifting. When you experience this more and more continually, the states that arise will become less and less convincing.

The Buddha says, "Know a confused mind as confused, and an unconfused mind as without confusion." We can be confused about all kinds of things. In fact, as long as conditioned experience is arising for us, there is confusion. More specifically, there are times when we are just extremely cloudy or vague. Perhaps we have been very mindful in our practice, knowing the rising and falling moments of stepping and breathing, or of looking into the koan. As we were mentioning earlier, perhaps at that time the mind is free of like and dislike, of judgments of good and bad. Since one is so familiar with good and bad, and like and dislike, when those are not present it can be difficult for us to know what to do. And so we become confused and fuddled as attention begins to settle into a kind of lack of interest, into a kind of subtle torpor which can be called boredom or just that "neutral" sensation. One is so used to cutting at grasping mind to the left, and negativity to the right, that one tries to cut into this flatness in the centre, and then there is confusion.

When confusion arises it is necessary simply to notice it, to have an awareness of this confusion. Confusion is not what Awareness is. Awareness cannot become confused. It is only because we have focused upon and identified with this particular facet of present experience that it can appear as if we "become confused." In this practice

anything that arises must be seen completely, that is to say, one must see it rise, dwell, and fall. And one must realize that this is occurring within experience, within Knowing. It is a moment of knowing. The practice is to know that each moment of knowing, no matter what it is, is always Knowing displaying itself as that apparent form. So, when confusion is present, simply know that.

When you are questioning deeply and come to a place where you just do not know what to question, then question that feeling. No matter what mood or state is coming or going, rising or falling, simply know it.

This is not a matter of entering into any kind of judgment about these states, but simply knowing what states are present. Some states are useful, some states are neutral or useless, and some states are harmful. Harmful states are those born out of contraction that give rise to further contraction. Neutral states are just states such as torpor, dullness, lack of interest, apathy. Useful states are those which are conducive to further insight, states such as mindfulness, clarity of the senses and of the body, energy, and so on. When such a state of clarity is used to deepen the process of insight, then it is useful and it leads to liberation.

However, this is not a matter of judging the states, and picking and choosing amongst them as if we were shopping. "I'll have one of those, two of those. Hmm, this doesn't look fresh. Oh no, I never buy that brand." When a state arises, just know it. If it is a contracted state, then if one openly attends to the contraction, the contraction ceases and it opens into the whole Field of present experience. When seen openly, a state that is conducive to the development of further insight becomes stronger, sharper, more precise. Therefore, it is not a matter of judging any of the states that are arising, but simply of knowing them as they are.

The **Sutta** says,

One knows sinking mind as sinking and scattered mind as scattered. One knows a mind that is open as open. One knows a mind that is contracted as contracted. One knows a mind that is limited as limited, and an unlimited mind as unlimited.

The word that we have translated as “open,” or mahagatam, also means “greatness.” It is a mind which has the quality of not being dominated by any of the states that are arising. A contracted mind is a shrivelled mind, a fixated mind. A mind that is limited is a mind that has been overcome – it means literally “underneath,” a time when one is falling into despair, or pride or any other such state or mood, without recognizing that fact. A mind which is “unlimited,” or anuttara, is a mind in which no mental state is predominant, a mind which is very open at that time.

The **Sutta** says,

One knows a concentrated mind as concentrated, and an unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated. One knows a free mind as free and an unfree mind as without freedom.

In this sense, free means “a moment of freedom.” Through the process of insight one recognizes little glimpses, openings, that arise. Each of these moments of openness are not to be grasped at or identified with, but are to be recognized simply as a mind which is experiencing a moment of freedom. And so, the process of direct insight can continue instead of referring back to a past moment of clarity.

Thus one lives, completely viewing the mind as mind

internally. One lives, completely viewing the mind as mind externally. Thus one lives, completely viewing mind as mind both internally and externally. One dwells observing the mind as phenomena which arise. One dwells observing the mind as phenomena which decay. Thus one dwells observing the mind as phenomena which both arise and decay. When the mindfulness 'this is mind' is established, there is just knowing and just mindfulness.

Mindfulness of Mental States

The air is growing colder and the nights are growing longer, but there is just this moment of feeling the cold, this moment of breathing in and breathing out, this feeling of rising and falling. Impermanence can be seen everywhere and in everything, because impermanence is how everything is.

Impermanence means there is nothing that can be grasped anywhere. Each thing is rising and falling. Each thing is the gathering together of many things which are rising and falling. Each movement is a series of many movements rising and falling. In any moment, there is just this moment of rising and falling. In lifting the foot to take a step, there is just lifting. Then there is the feeling of the cool air on the sole of the foot, the contact of the heel, the sides of the foot, the toes, the grappling of the big toe for support, the rolling of the weight. In each moment, there is just the rising and falling of this moment. There is nothing that can be grasped anywhere. But there is also nothing that stands apart, nothing that is in a position to grasp, nothing separate. And so there is no need to grasp.

Each moment of rising and falling arises within Knowing. Each attempt to grasp attempts to achieve the

impossible – it attempts to hold that which cannot be held, and also introduces a separation which is non-existent. Establishing mindfulness, moment after moment, means doing what we do as completely as we can. Taking a step, taking a breath, eating, realizing that we have been lost in thought, feeling tired, feeling ill, feeling clear and sharp, feeling a moment of pride and a moment of failure, observing the rising and falling moments that arise and fall as each moment.

We establish mindfulness of body, mindfulness of reactivity, and mindfulness of mind. The **Satipatthana sutta** speaks of the next foundation of mindfulness of mental states, or mental factors, or dhammas.

The **Sutta** says,

And how, monks, does one live completely viewing mental states as states? Here, monks, one lives completely viewing the five coverings as mental states. And how, monks, does one live completely viewing the five coverings as mental states?

Here, monks, when there is a sensual desire present in oneself one knows, 'here is desire.' When sense-desire is absent, one knows, 'there is no desire here.' One knows the arising of the absent desire-impulse, one knows the releasing of the arisen desire-impulse, one knows the future non-arising of abandoned desire.

When there is aggression present in oneself, one knows, 'here is aggression.' When there is no aggression in oneself, one knows, 'there is no aggression here.' One knows the arising of absent aggression, one knows the releasing of aggression, one knows the future non-arising of aggression.

When there is dullness present in oneself, one knows, 'here is dullness.' When there is no dullness in oneself, one knows, 'there is no dullness here.' One knows the arising

of absent dullness, one knows the releasing of dullness, one knows the future non-arising of dullness.

When there is excitement and remorse present in oneself one knows, 'there is excitement and remorse.' When there is no excitement and remorse in oneself, one knows, 'there is no excitement and remorse here.' One knows the arising of absent excitement and remorse, one knows the releasing of excitement and remorse, one knows the future non-arising of excitement and remorse.

When there is hesitation present in oneself one knows, 'here is hesitation.' When there is no hesitation in oneself, one knows, 'there is no hesitation here.' One knows the arising of absent hesitation, one knows the releasing of hesitation, one knows the future non-arising of hesitation.

The Five Coverings, Five Skandhas

From mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of movement, mindfulness of perception as it is, from observing moments of reactivity such as liking, disliking, indifference, and observing the various moods that can overtake the mind, or moments in which the mind stands clear, one then needs to observe more closely and with greater detail the kind of things that the mind gets into.

Sensual desire, aggression, dullness, excitement and hesitation are the five coverings, sometimes known as the five obstructions or hindrances. These are the five mental states which cover or obstruct the mind. They slow the process of insight unless they are attended to, because they are states that are quite habitual with most people.

Sometimes, when we are sitting zazen, we find moments of sexual fantasy beginning to spring up and images of disembodied body parts fly around through the

air; long drawn out moments of compulsion arise which can express themselves visually, or in a tactile manner, or simply in a focusing of wanting. Sensual desire is a state many people summon quite often throughout their lives in order to perk things up or to have something to identify with: a feeling, an activity, a relationship with another person, or simply the search for such a thing. As you know, this can keep you so busy that mindfulness, compassion, clarity and waking up never even occur to you. You are too busy with your hair or worrying about your paunch. Of course, there is nothing wrong with love; that is not what's spoken of here. Love is something which seems to be experienced only very rarely in the course of people's lives, because we are so often occupied with sensual desire and aggression, dullness, excitement and hesitation.

When we hear lists of mental states and factors like these, it appears to be quite tempting to want to check them out and to see which ones that we have and which ones we don't. That is not particularly useful, because any term that one might use can be interpreted quite differently from person to person. I might, for example, refer to something as "fear" and you might, on the other hand, think of it as "hesitation." Or I might speak of "frustration," and you might think of the same thing as "irritation." I think that we can get into problems when we find ourselves confronted with these lists and start to strategize. The main thing is to realize that what is being talked about is the need to be quite precise and to know whatever state is present.

These lists are a description of states that rise and fall, but that we usually do not recognize fully and clearly. We find attention becoming ensnared within them rather than attending to them and so there is contraction. Contraction is a limitation of our experience and helps to propagate not

only that particular contraction or state, but also the *avijja*⁵ or misunderstanding about the nature of what life is, of what these forms and colours and sounds and tactile sensations are. That is the true point of considering any such list of mental states or factors.

The **Satipatthana sutta** says that when such and such state is present in oneself, one knows, ‘here it is.’ When it is not here, then one knows ‘there is no (whatever it is) here.’ One knows it as it comes up, through the knowing of it, through attending to it. One knows the moment that it is released, the moment that the contraction opens into the Field⁶. And one knows that at this moment, it is no longer arising. Perhaps, if one’s insight is deep, one will have seen so deeply into the contraction, the pattern or texture of attention that underlies such a state, that the state itself will no longer tend to arise.

An important thing to understand about these states is that they are simply tendencies. They are simply things which happen. These states and tendencies do not say anything about you. Just because there is aggression present, this does not mean that you are a bad person or that you will never wake up because you are getting so continually and obsessively “pissed off” at everybody else in the Zendo during kinhin or in oryoki. You are sitting there watching everybody scoop out their little portions of agedashi tofu and thinking, “You pig, I wanted that.” You don’t think this on purpose. The thought simply comes up. It is something completely impersonal. It is a tendency. It

⁵ “Avidya” or “not knowing” in Sanskrit; “mumyo” or “no light” in Japanese. “Not too bright.” The fundamental misunderstanding about experience that is the root of self-image.

⁶ The “Field” refers to the total Field of present experiencing as it arises through the simultaneous functioning of the various modes of knowing of the bodymind.

is not you. It will not and cannot “make” you aggressive. There is only a moment of aggression present here, and attention is contracted in a particular manner. Simply notice that and attend to it.

Nothing that arises within practice is an obstacle to practice. The process of insight and mindfulness can come from underneath any covering.

The sudden arising of these states within intensive practice occurs because they are habitual to us. Through the process of opening the patterns of attention, various contractions will begin to arise so that they can be opened. However, if we fixate upon these then, for that moment, the process of mindfulness or insight has been stopped. But if, at the moment that we recognize that we are not mindful, we simply notice that, then mindfulness has been re-established.

You don’t have to be perfect. Just do each thing as completely and as thoroughly as you can, and then more and more you will find yourself able to breathe, to stand, to sit, and to lie down with the whole bodymind, with the single bodymind, stepping and penetrating further and further into the nature of your experience. Each thing that you are experiencing arises within Knowing. You are not anything which is being known. There is simply this process of Knowing displaying itself. You are this process of Knowing in itself, which displays itself as all possible experiences.

When one is attending moment after moment, many different kinds of experiences can occur. Sometimes one might find that a great deal of mental scattering is present. Fragments of thought and images, or perhaps a kind of wildness of mind in which old songs, movie themes, the names of television game shows and other bizarre things, can begin to come up and you are no longer aware of the

field of view, or the field of hearing, the field of touch, and so on. At such a time it is as if the mind is burning. If you do not add any fuel to the fire, if you maintain as much mindfulness as you are able to by attending to the body, to the Field, to the breath, to the koan, and to the scattering itself, then the scattering does indeed become a burning, but a burning away of many levels of obstruction, habit and tendency. It becomes a purification instead of an obstruction. Similarly, there are often moments of great pain or intense itching. There are also, of course, moments of bliss, enthusiasm and joy. These can also be obstructive if they are not noticed.

The **Sutta** next discusses the five binding groups, called the five *skandhas* in Sanskrit or *khandhas* in Pali:

Moreover, monks, one lives completely viewing the five binding groups as mental states. And how, monks, does one live completely viewing the five binding groups as mental states? Here, monks, this is form, this is the rising of appearance. This is the falling of form.

This is reaction. This is the rising of reaction. This is the falling of reaction.

This is symbolization. This is the rising of symbolization. This is the falling of symbolization.

This is habitual patterning. This is the rising of habitual patterning. This is the falling of habitual patterns.

This is consciousness. This is the rising of consciousness. This is the falling of consciousness.

Moment after moment, by attending to the five skandhas as the process of how experience is displaying itself, one can begin to see the process and pattern of it, the rising and falling moments of each of these. This can easily become a kind of intellectual analysis but this would not

be mindfulness or insight, which is simply a direct process of attending.

Sometimes one has more experience of “form” than of anything else, some experience of body taking a step, feeling a pain. One is aware of “reactivity”: liking, disliking and neutral. Sometimes “symbolization” is more dominant, one is aware of coding and identifying what is seen, heard, or felt. One is aware of “habitual patterns” beginning to come up, or one is aware of just the fact of “consciousness,” the fact of being conscious.

One can also use the five skandhas to speak of how a moment of perception and cognition arises and functions in the context of self-image. First, there is form, which is a moment of freezing, of knowing that something is being known. This is the process of objectification which is how knowing occurs within self-image, within a structure of dualism. So there is a moment of crystallization or freezing. Then, one begins to check it out with the next skandha of basic reactivity. You check it out to see if you can get something from it, or to see if it’s going to threaten you, or if you can just ignore it as much as is possible. And then it starts to become sharper and clearer, through the third skandha of symbolization. What is it? Perhaps a sound, perhaps a feeling – you aren’t quite sure yet. And then, as it builds up, you begin to relate it to previous experiences and to look for something similar to compare it to. With the fourth skandha you determine how you will relate to it now. And then, finally, there is the fifth skandha, the moment of becoming “conscious” of it.

Sometimes, you can see that you are being quite mindful but, at the same time, you feel somewhat stupid because you hear a sound and you have no idea what it is. It is the gong striking to signal the end of the sitting period, or the striking of the clappers signalling the start of kinhin,

or it is the sound of a bird's song, or something of this nature. You are confused for a moment; you are just hearing this sound but you are not quite sure what it is. This is a kind of mindfulness which has become stuck.

You should be able to know what the sight or sound is without getting caught in it. If you are attending deeply, and you hear the sound of the bird, or a car, or the breathing of the person sitting next to you, you probably would not name it, but if you were asked, you would be able to. If you are unable to, then that is fine; it only means that there was a moment of sinking. Perhaps you are becoming physically tired, or perhaps you are beginning to settle down. You must then examine it and see.

Sometimes, we might think that such a state has something to do with enlightenment, or that it is a powerful kind of insight that needs no words, but the fact is that, at such a moment, we are simply unable to use words. This is just a frozen place that we must heat up and melt through attending more clearly with the brightness of the flame of insight.

There are also times when we might be observing the arising of experience so deeply and so closely, that we can see the moment in which objectification, something being known, arises. And we also see how it gets fleshed out, how it becomes an object. Then it falls, and we notice that something else is forming. It then goes through the process of becoming more and more some kind of object, and then it falls. At such a time, we might hear the sound of a bird, and we might not be able to name it as the sound of a bird, simply because we are hearing each component of that sound. It is something that happens within sitting practice. However, if there is discursiveness going on – some internal watcher commenting, “Oh, look at this” – then, of course, we are not observing in fine detail the components

of the arising of perception and cognition; we are simply in that kind of sinking state that was mentioned previously.

Various Obstructions, the Ayatanas

The five binding groups, or the five piles or heaps, constitute conditioned experience. If we do not see each thing clearly, then everything starts to pile up. In the process of mindfulness we often encounter such piles and heaps. Huge waves of feeling come up. We find ourselves laughing uncontrollably, or crying. Waves of feelings of desolation, anger, petulance are not only common, they occur to each and every person who is engaged in the beginning stages of mindfulness practice. There are many lists of such feelings and states that can all of a sudden pile up and take one unawares.

They include such things as wanting to live a “normal life,” feelings and thoughts, images and memories about family and friends, wanting to have lots of babies all of a sudden. An exaggerated concern over the state of our oryoki bowls and the cleanliness of the zabuton⁷ are very common indeed. These things begin to pile up when we are not seeing clearly moment by moment, and so we don’t see the arising factors that give rise to these states. They are often considered to be obstacles. If we identify with these states and are deflected from pursuing precise mindfulness, then our practice, at that moment, is obstructed; but at the very moment that we recognize the obstruction, mindfulness is once more established and even more strengthened.

The search for entertainment can be an obstacle.

⁷ The flat sitting mat.

Taking ourselves too seriously in our practice however is also an obstacle. Once more, these are tendencies that run throughout our lives. When we practise, and especially when we practise intensively, these states will manifest themselves quite intensely and vibrantly. Self-pity, reluctance, lack of energy or excitement, doubt, anger and criticism of oneself and others, all spring up because we are not attending to what we are doing as we do it.

After mentioning the five binding groups, the **Sutta** asks us to develop *apasana* or “insight,” “a looking into,” the six internal and external sense fields or *ayatanas*. The **Sutta** says,

And now, monks, one lives completely viewing the six internal and external sense fields as mental states. And how, monks, does one live completely viewing the six subjective and objective sense fields as mental states?

Here monks, one knows the eye, one knows the visual objects, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both. Here monks, one knows the ear, one knows the sounds, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both. Here monks, one knows the nose, one knows the smells, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both. Here monks, one knows the tongue, one knows the tastes, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both. Here monks, one knows the body, one knows the tangibles, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both. Here monks, one knows the mind, one knows the mental objects, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both.

This bond that arises between the sense fields, such as visual perception, can be called the sense consciousness: the eye consciousness, the ear consciousness, the nose consciousness and so on. We can call this a bond because

connecting one thing to another thing can only occur if there is a presumption of separation. And so, when there is contact between this presumed inside and outside there is a kind of friction. From this friction arises liking, disliking, or indifference and almost all of the various confusions that are listed so thoroughly and endlessly in the **Abhidhamma**.

Within the experience of seeing there is no separation between seer and the seen: they both arise as the act of seeing. There is no separation between a hearer and something heard: they both arise as the direct experience of hearing. As I have mentioned, all mental phenomena also occur in sensory terms. There is no split between mind and body, or between inside and outside, because they all arise within Experiencing. When there is a presumption of separation, then there is an attempt to overcome this separation because it makes us feel claustrophobic but instead it merely extends our claustrophobia. We feel separate from what we are seeing, and therefore, we peer at it, or glare, or turn our gaze away, blankly.

In the arising of experience, each moment of knowing rises and falls equally and directly within the Field of present experience. When you hear a sound sometimes you name the sound immediately, or perhaps you dislike or like the sound immediately. You have some kind of association with it, some concept of it. Sometimes you can hear the sound and there is a clarity to that moment of sounding because your naming it does not obstruct it at that moment. Sometimes you hear the sound and you can feel attention moving towards it although the sound was already arising within attention, was already arising within experience.

This movement of attention towards a sound is not something that is done with the ear; it is done through a process of contraction from a presumed experiencer

towards an experience, from a perceiver point to a perception. It is from this simple movement of attention towards and away from objects that the groundwork is laid for our reactivity, our conceptualization, completely obscuring the vividness of the perception with our usual habits and endless cycles of conditioning.

Can we notice what the hearing is like at the moment that a sound is heard? What are the colours like? What the incense smells like? What does it smell like, the smell of all these bodies sitting in this room for such a long time? Or the smell of the autumn air? The smell of your skin?

Experience is always a very direct and uncomplicated matter. It is always a very simple and effortless gesture, a gesture of offering, we could say. The colours and forms simply appear. The sounds simply appear. Thought and feelings simply appear, and fall and fade and vanish.

The Seven Factors of Awakening

We have discussed many of the strange things that can arise on the Straight Path and that can act as obstacles. Next, we will consider the seven factors of awakening, or how to bring these obstacles on to the path.

The **Sutta** says,

And again, monks, one lives completely viewing the seven factors of awakening as mental states. And how, monks, does one live completely viewing the seven factors of awakening as mental states?

Here, monks, when the factor of mindfulness is present in oneself one knows the factor of mindfulness is present. One knows the arising of the absent factor of mindfulness, and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor

of mindfulness.

Here, monks, when the factor of investigation of reality is present in oneself one knows the factor of investigation of reality is present. One knows the arising of the absent factor of investigation of reality, and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of investigation of reality.

Here, monks, when the factor of energy is present in oneself one knows the factor of energy is present. One knows the arising of the absent factor of energy, and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of energy.

Here, monks, when the factor of joy is present in oneself one knows the factor of joy is present. One knows the arising of the absent factor of joy, and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of joy.

Here, monks, when the factor of calm is present in oneself one knows the factor of calm is present. One knows the arising of the absent factor of calm, and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of calm.

Here, monks, when the factor of concentration is present in oneself one knows the factor of concentration is present. One knows the arising of the absent factor of concentration, and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of concentration.

Here, monks, when the factor of equanimity is present in oneself one knows the factor of equanimity is present. One knows the arising of the absent factor of equanimity, and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of equanimity.

The seven factors are the deepening of the process of mindfulness and insight. The factor of mindfulness is one of balancing, of bringing forth what is hidden, of releasing what is contracted, of exposing oneself more and more completely to experience as it is through mindfulness of

body, of sensation, of mind and of mental states, including the factor of mindfulness. While there are many tendencies and patterns, many habits of contraction and avoidance, aggression and fear that arise again and again in our lives and thus in our practice, there are also other mental factors which arise such as mindfulness and investigation or basic curiosity, questioning, energy, vigour, rapture, joyfulness, calm, concentration and equanimity. Through attending to what is arising as fully as we can we are able to attend fully more and more.

By realizing that whatever seems to obstruct the path is itself arising within experience and is itself part of the path, the path continually deepens. The balancing factor of mindfulness is energized with investigation or questioning. This is the energy of recognizing what is wholesome, or open, and what is unwholesome or contracted and observing the contraction so openly that it releases it.

Realizing the openness of wholesome factors and practising them more fully a natural joyfulness begins to arise. One begins to sense the elegance and dignity of experience just as it is, of taking a step, of breathing, of being one who is in this moment, and of exploring who one is further and yet more deeply. Through this exploration one begins to see more and more clearly, and this clarity brings about a kind of calm which allows further investigation, which we can call concentration or harmony, until one realizes the equanimity of everything that is arising and there is no avoidance, no identification, there is just clear and open seeing. There is just the purity of insight⁸.

⁸For further on the seven factors see **The Heart of This Moment: Zen Teachings on the Seven Factors of Awakening** by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi, Great Matter Publications, 1989.

The Ten Imperfections of Insight

At this point I would like to introduce another list, one that does not actually appear in the **Satipatthana sutta** but is very relevant to it. This list is quite important in the traditional commentaries on mindfulness and insight and is known as “the ten imperfections,” or “stains” of insight. There are many similar lists in the Mahamudra, Dzogchen, Chan and Zen traditions but since we are considering a classical text such as the **Satipatthana** we will bring forth this advice from the traditional Pali commentaries.

Just as moments of deep confusion, obsession with pain, fear of death, fear of insanity, and other contracted states can arise, there are various other states that arise which, if they are clung to, can distract our practice, slow it, or even cause us to cease practising. In Zen these are called *makyo*.

The first of the ten imperfections or stains is “light.” Sometimes, as we are deeply attending to the rising and falling moments of each thing, all of a sudden we see a kind of light flickering, perhaps like a firefly, or there is a sudden burst of light as if a door was suddenly opened in a dark room, and we are startled. Or we can see light streaming from our head and heart, or from our fingertips. Or we can find ourselves pervaded by a brilliance, as if we were seeing over a vast expanse of sea. Or we can even be sitting in a darkened room and all of a sudden be able to see each object very clearly as if it were daylight. If we are startled by this experience, if we identify with it and hold on to this experience, then the process of mindfulness has become disrupted. Every experience that arises is only confusion, no matter how profound or extraordinary that event might seem to have been, unless it is seen with insight and the understanding of its radical impermanence,

its emptiness, and its non-self nature.

The next imperfection is “rapture,” which refers to moments of physical ecstasy that can arise in practice; a trembling that can occur moving up and down through the body, bringing forth tears of gladness. Again, because we become interested in or are frightened by such experiences, we might put aside our own practice and either indulge in, or attempt to avoid such a state.

The third imperfection is “tranquility.” Seeing very clearly the rising and falling moments of experience, we find that there is very little to react to, we could simply lose interest and not penetrate further. We would simply dwell in a kind of tranquil, calm, but dead condition.

The fourth imperfection is “bliss.” This can be experiences of sublime bliss which might have physical characteristics such as the heart pounding, the face becoming flushed, even excitation of the sexual organs. Or it might be purely mental. We lose awareness of the body and simply surrender into this sensation of bliss and believe that this is deep-seeing into the nature of all experience. We think that this is kensho, and thus put aside our questioning. This would be a defilement of the process of practice.

The fifth is “confidence, determination and zeal.” Sometimes we find that our practice is going so well that we feel quite confident and cocky, and so we no longer attend fully. Or we might feel a great confidence in the Dharma, in Zen, and think that “This is so wonderful!” We want to get up and tell everybody how wonderful practice is instead of practising. We might want to go out and build many Zen centres and temples instead of practising at that moment. While this kind of feeling is fine as such, when we are practising formally and inquiring into and attending to the rising and falling of what is arising within

Knowing, this is a defilement.

The sixth imperfection is “action and energy.” This is a kind of excitement that can cause us to lose the clarity of questioning.

The seventh is actually “strong mindfulness,” which is so consistent that we get up, walk around, go to bed and live our lives with a very strong quality of mindfulness. We are convinced that we have woken up, but instead we have identified with this mindfulness and are holding it in check so that it does not penetrate further.

The eighth is “knowledge.” An insight into various passages in the sutras and commentaries, the poetry, koan, or the *mondo*⁹ of Zen masters might spring up in us, or we might suddenly realize something about the process of mindfulness, insight, practice, and we start thinking about that instead of practising. Of course, it is fine if these thoughts come up, as long as they are known as just thoughts and as long as they are seen as rising and falling moments. It is the attachment to them that makes them a defilement. It is not that we practise completely devoid of any thoughts nor is it a matter of trying to figure out the Dharma through thinking about it. We must attend openly.

The ninth is “equanimity” becoming so rich and open that it becomes identified with, transformed into a feeling-tone or stance, and becomes a kind of indifference or flatness.

The tenth is simply “gratification” or a sense of wonder and joy at the practice and at what one is experiencing, at how one is experiencing, and again, one becomes fixated within these feelings rather than investigating them.

⁹ “Question and answer”; a classical record of a dialogue between a Zen Teacher and student.

Any of these ten might arise. Any of these, if held to, can even become grounds for misunderstanding the process of practice entirely and so these are sometimes called “pseudo-enlightenments.” No matter what one experiences within practice, unless it is practised, unless it is seen into, it can become a blockage, an obstruction. And even the worst obstruction, the worst fear, the most hidden areas of our minds, our lives and our bodies, when seen into, become gateways to lead us further and deeper into the Straight Path.

Travelling the Straight Path

As we travel the Straight Path we find that it cuts through everything. It cuts across all boundaries of private and public, of inside and outside, of good and bad, of self and other. The Straight Path cuts through and across everything, and yet, everything arises within the Straight Path. This is why it is so straight. The path of the Buddhas is really just being straightforward with whatever is arising and knowing it as it is. Know body as body, sensation as sensation, mind as mind and mental states as mental states.

Now, the more closely that we pay attention and the more precise that we are, the more room that there is for mishap. We might think that we should have everything all straightened out and under control. Instead, we find that the more precise we are, the more room that there is for confusion to come up so that it can be worked out and clarified through the process of seeing it as it is, through being straightforward with each experience.

Travelling the Straight Path, we find that all things come up before us, right around us, right within us. Any moment of apparent separation also arises within this

wholeness. Any moment of confusion arises within this wholeness. The Straight Path is the path of bringing body and mind together into balance, of balancing our life free from the extremes of self and other, good and bad, like and dislike. Through this, we can begin to recognize all kinds of sordidness and corruption. We recognize all kinds of hidden areas, but even the hidden areas occur in the openness of our experience as it is. Each moment of hesitation, each moment of distraction, each strategy, each game, arises within this whole moment of knowing.

When we begin to recognize just how petty our little hoard of thoughts, feelings and states truly is, we also begin to recognize the elegance and dignity of the whole moment. No matter how much we might whine, deny or denigrate, no matter how often we might fall into shame or guilt, aggression or fear, still, in the feeling of the toes, the heel touching the ground, the rising or falling of the breath, the rising and falling of sounds and forms, there is nothing that needs to hide. As we balance body, breath, speech and mind through mindfulness, can we bring all of our fears, everything that we would hide, together with the openness of experience as it is? Because when we do so, that which is hidden, opens.

As we travel the Straight Path, we begin to get new information from all over. We begin to know what it is like to be as we are in this moment, what it is like to take a step, what it is like to taste food, what it is like when we are angry. We begin to see the play of energy leaping and jumping through the muscles, the nerves, the mind.

In this information there is some good news and some bad news. I'll tell you the bad news first because eventually it will become good news: the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are so central to the Buddhadharma that they were actually the first things that

the Buddha taught at the Deer Park near Benares to his five companions, Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama and Assaji. He told them that everything is impermanent, and yet there is grasping and therefore suffering and dissatisfaction. We must understand that the root of this fact of the First Noble Truth of suffering, of dukkha, is to be found in the Second Truth of craving, this continual grasping at that which cannot be grasped. We must truly understand this. This is bad news.

Then the news starts to become somewhat better with the Third Noble Truth: grasping is unnecessary. Nothing can be grasped, nothing needs to be grasped. There can be an end to grasping and thus an end to suffering, to conditioning. There can be an end to the endless round of birth and death, the endless round of believing that we are one thing, becoming invested in it, and in the next moment having it change on us, having another set of thoughts and feelings, having another experience that we're not quite ready for yet. This endless round of conditioning, that arises through misunderstanding the nature of our experience and what is being experienced, can be ended.

This brings us to the Fourth Noble Truth, which is good news indeed. We can end this conditioning by simply paying attention to it. We really don't need to do anything special. We simply need to do whatever we are doing, thoroughly and completely. The way to the goal is not found by gazing towards something distant. It is present right in this moment. Right in this moment of confusion. Right in this moment of suffering. And we can clarify it. This is good news.

The **Satipatthana sutta** says,

And again, monks, one lives completely viewing the four noble truths as mental states. And how, monks, does one

live completely viewing the four noble truths as mental states? Here monks, this is suffering. Thus one knows it as it is. This is the arising of suffering. Thus one knows it as it is. This is the ending of suffering. Thus one knows it as it is. This is the way to the ending of suffering. Thus one knows it as it is.

Thus one lives completely, viewing mental states as states, internally. One lives completely, viewing mental states as states, externally. Thus one lives completely, viewing mental states as states, both internally and externally. One dwells observing mental states as phenomena which arise. One dwells observing mental states as phenomena which decay. Thus one dwells observing mental states as phenomena which both arise and decay. When the mindfulness 'these are mental states' is established, there is just knowing and just mindfulness.

Each moment of knowing what is actually going on begins to undo the tightly woven structures of our tendencies and convictions. Despite our experience, we are convinced that the impermanent is permanent. We are convinced that the causes of suffering are the causes of pleasure. We are convinced that, where there is no self, there is a self. We grasp on to thoughts and feelings, sights and sounds; yet, there is nothing to hold on to because each thing is impermanent. We believe that if we can hold on to these things, then we can anchor ourselves. We believe that we will not be pushed by circumstances if only we can hold on to this state. If we can just be *really* pissed off, somehow it will all work out. If we can just be *really* arrogant, it will all work out. Somehow, if we could just whine loudly enough and plaintively enough, the skies would open and we would be forgiven by the Great Cosmic Parent. But all this is only confusion, only suffering.

We believe that “we” are doing the thinking and feeling, but thoughts and feelings just arise and, in arising, go. I think that this might sound a little bit like bad news again, so let me try to give you another view of it. Everything that arises vanishes, leaving room for the next moment to arise. Although nothing can be grasped, this ungraspability presents us with the very richness of our lives. This richness of experience is possible because of impermanence.

Dogen zenji, the founder of the Soto Zen Lineage, said over and over again that, “Impermanence is Buddha Nature.” The possibility of waking up, the possibility of freedom from suffering, the possibility of truly understanding who we are and what the world is, is found in the groundlessness of our existence. Impermanence and the knowing of impermanence are the gate into freedom. That which knows impermanence is also impermanent. Each knowing of something arises and falls, and each moment of knowing and each object of knowledge arise only within the tracelessness, the Open Expanse of Knowing itself. And this Knowing is just Knowing. It is not an object, thing, entity, self, or state. It is an Open Expanse.

As we walk the Straight Path step after step, moment after moment, as we trip and fall and rise to our feet once more ... as we lurch forward on the zafu and almost bang our heads on the wall ... as our oryoki bowls clatter on the floor and the food spills in all directions ... as we speak to someone we love and realize that we have cut them deeply through our misunderstanding and confusion ... at that moment, we can rise once more to our feet and travel the Straight Path.

The more straightforward that we are, the more honest and exposed that we allow ourselves to be, the straighter the path becomes. We begin to discover that everything is workable. No matter what the state is,

everything is workable. However, we only truly understand this when we decide to work with whatever is arising, no matter what. This workability is possible because everything is impermanent. No matter how completely screwed up you might be in one moment, in the moment of recognizing this, that moment has fallen. Each moment is a turning point on which whatever is arising falls. Therefore, we are never stuck with anything. We take one step... and we always have room to take the next step. This is good news.

When we take the path in this way, mind and body step together, synchronized, balanced and whole; and when we can walk the Straight Path in this way then it can become the Direct Path, the radical path, because we now have all of our energy available to us. Our attention is no longer scattered and broken up in patterns and structures of contraction and we can begin to ask ourselves the most radical questions of all: "What is it that is aware of this?" "What is it that knows this?" "What is it that is being known?" In attending to the rising and falling moment of the koan, "What is it that rises and falls?" "What is it that sees this?"

The path walked by the Buddha, that walked by the mahasiddhas Tilopa, Saraha and Garab Dorje, the path of Bodhidharma and Huineng, Dogen zenji and Keizan zenji, are all the same path. They are all the straightforward and Direct Path of practising this present moment of experience.

The Buddha has this to say about that:

And if, monks, one practises these four foundations of mindfulness for seven years, one of two desired fruits can be expected: direct insight into present experiencing, or though still some traces of grasping, the condition of no returning.
Direct insight into present experiencing is sometimes

called in Pali the state of being an “arahat.” If we want to be more accurate and indicate that it is not a state or graspable at all we can call it “shattering the mirror.” Sometimes it is called “Dharmakaya.” Sometimes it is called “the Unborn.” Sometimes it is called the “unconditional freedom of the heart of Awareness.”

The “condition of no returning” means knowing in each moment that it is only this moment. It means to know that there is only Knowing presenting itself in this rising and falling of each moment.

The Buddha goes on:

Forget the seven years monks. If one practises these four foundations of mindfulness for six years, for five, for four, for three or two, even for one year, one of two desired fruits can be expected: direct insight into here and now or, if there are still some traces of grasping, the condition of no returning. Forget the year, monks. If one practices these four foundations of mindfulness for seven months, one of two desired fruits can be expected: direct insight into present experiencing or, if there are still some traces of grasping, the condition of no returning. Forget the seven months, monks. If one practises these four foundations of mindfulness for six months, for five, or four, or three, or two, or one, or even for half-a-month, one of two desired fruits can be expected: direct insight into here and now or, if there are still some traces of grasping, the condition of no returning. Forget the half-a-month, monks. If one practises these four foundations of mindfulness for seven days, one of two desired fruits can be expected: direct insight into present experiencing or, if there are still some traces of grasping, the condition of no returning.

If one can maintain and continually renew open

attention to what is presently arising moment after moment, moment to moment, for seven years, six years, or even for seven days, continually, then the Buddha guarantees direct insight into present experiencing or, if there are still some traces of grasping, the condition of no returning.

Seeing how incomplete our practice might be moment to moment is in fact the way to renew and refresh our practice. As we come close to the falling moment of this seven-day O-sesshin, we can recognize how much effort that we all have made. Some of you have practised in the midst of torpor, dullness and rage. Some of you have practised while in the midst of illness. Some of you have practised in the midst of the arising of various experiences of light and bliss, fear and terror. Some of you have experienced moments of great ease and clarity. Some have had an understanding of the inherent freedom of experience, even if for just a moment.

Although we have made such efforts, we can also recognize how incomplete our practice has often been. We can feel saddened, resentful or guilty about this. However, if we can just attend to those feelings instead, we can use that recognition to inspire further effort, further determination, in each moment of experience as it arises.

The **Sutta** says,

This is why I have said that this is the straight path, monks, for the purity of beings, for stepping past sorrow and crying, for the setting of suffering and distress, for finding the right way, for the direct seeing of nibbana, and that is the four foundations of mindfulness.

Thus spoke the generous one. Their hearts raised, the monks enjoyed the discourse of the generous one.

When he awakened beneath the bodhi tree, Siddhartha Gautama lost himself. He was no longer Siddhartha. He was only Awareness, only Knowing in itself. In losing himself he became the Generous One and was able to show others through word, through example, through deed, through his perfect realization and his imperfectness of waking up groggy in the morning, of having sore knees and finally, of dying bodily just as everyone else does, that each being can practise and realize unconditional freedom. For this gift, I have no words; but I can say that for the efforts that all have made in this O-sesshin, there is a depth of feeling for your sincerity that can only express itself in my determination to help you to continue and deepen your practice as fully as I am able to.

Before the Buddhas and Dharma Ancestors, standing in the midst of all beings, may we each vow to walk this Straight Path and to bring together all that is into the seamless expanse that is the nature of the arising of each thing.

Please, enjoy yourselves.

*May the merit of this
penetrate each thing and all places so that I and all beings
may together realize the buddhaway.*

This chant is called the **Verse of Closing the Sutra**. I am finished talking but our practice continues.



Part Three:
**Going
Further**

BACKPACKING

THE STRAIGHT PATH

from a Dharma Assembly
(January 5th and 6th, 1991)

The Backpack

Bodhidharma, the ancient worthy who brought Zen from India to China, called Zen “a direct transmission”; but of course Bodhidharma was a sleazy old fart and a liar because Zen is no such thing. Zen is simply the practice and realization of Awareness itself and Awareness itself has nothing indirect or direct to it. There really is nothing to say.

We could say that Zen is a path, but what path could there be? There is just this moment, just this breathing in and breathing out. We never really go anywhere because we are always right here. Sometimes we are sitting in the Zendo, sometimes we are sitting on the toilet, sometimes we are sitting behind the wheel of a car, sometimes we are lying down and sometimes we are walking; but wherever we are, we are always right here. That never changes. However, because we have some notion of where we have been, it can be useful to talk about where we are going in this practice and so we can provisionally speak of a path.

Sometimes we are small, we can hardly talk, we don’t have very much hair and we are fat around the elbows and knees. When we get older, our knees get gangly and we grow hair in the most unusual places. Eventually our bellies start to slip over our belt and the flesh on our neck begins to wrinkle in baroque patterns. But in each moment, it is always this moment. That never changes.

Since we don't really realize that, we have to fabricate all kinds of things in order to talk about Zen. We have to say that it is a "path," and to make it clearer say that it is a "Direct Path." We have to talk about "kensho," about things that happen as you practise the journey of this path. But of course it is all really quite absurd because the path does not begin anywhere and does not end anywhere. The path is simply this moment as it is. Kensho is simply knowing this moment as it is, without compromise.

The doubletalk of self-image has fabricated many opinions out of its basic duality about everything, about Zen, about who we are and what the world is, what this moment is, what this body is, what this mind is. Since the situation is so cluttered with constructions, Zen masters like Bodhidharma and others had, in return, to say all kinds of things that they knew are not really true. This is called "washing dirt with mud" or "using poison as medicine."

Zen Teachers have to say things like "**pay attention,**" which is actually an absurd thing to say because everything is always already arising within attention. We have no choice at all about that. We are always paying attention, even when we get lost in a thought and the room vanishes, even when we get lost in feeling and become completely contracted. It is just that we believe that attention can be limited and narrowed and focused and identified with what is arising within attention. Although we might not be aware of the fact that we and all beings, all forms, all realms and all states are simply arising and falling within attention, that is just how things are.

Zen masters have to say very silly things and so Zen is called a Direct Path. That means that Zen practice is not a matter of building up anything, or of gaining anything because we have never lacked anything in the first place. The Direct Path is simply realizing Awareness itself by

being aware. Now that is so simple and we are so complex, we have so many likes and dislikes, so many habits, so many tendencies, that we couldn't even begin to practise such a simple thing.

Since Zen is about realizing what Awareness is, we have to be given something that we can practise with, so we begin the Direct Path by practising the Straight Path. The Straight Path is mindfulness of body, of reactivity, of mind and of mental factors. The Straight Path is a matter of beginning to align ourselves with what our experience is, so that we can then enter directly into this experience.

Just after our recent O-sesshin Shikai sensei wrote a short poem on beginning the Straight Path. I would like to read it to you.

Backpacking The Straight Path (Instructions for the Zendo)

Bare bones
bare flesh
ONLY

Leave the backpack of self-image:
parent, child, male, female,
straight, gay, old, young,
black, white, older, younger,
at the door with your
shoes and socks

Pick it up on the way out
Too heavy?
Unpack in Suchness
and the load
lightens

There is not really that much we need to travel the Straight Path, but we are always carrying so much around with us and we are so convinced that we need this stuff that we need to look into this conviction before we can even begin. Moment after moment, day after day, we gather up and collect our experiences, our habits and tendencies, and the things that we learn, whether those things actually work or not. We have such a full pack that it is very heavy, and because it is so heavy we in turn can feel quite solid and substantial and so never have to face the fact that we are really a basic openness and clarity that is too vast to be a "self." We have tirelessly collected so many credentials and qualifications that we think that they must refer to something. We are beautiful or ugly, sad or happy, male or female, rich or poor.

Now, you could say that we are all different. Some of us are carpenters and writers and electricians and some of us are not good for anything. Some of us are men and some of us are women, some of us are older and some of us are younger. Some of us are secretly convinced that we are the most important people in the world and are just waiting for everybody else to find out. Others of us think that we are the most horrid person in the world and are just dreading the moment everybody else finds out. Some of us specialize in both of those.

Now, although we all are very different from each other, we all have something in common, and that is the fact that we are alive right now, and that our life is not what we think it is. Somehow we have come to think that our life is *the things in our life*. We think that our life is the people we know, the books that we read, the talents and skills we have, and our secret recipe for pasta sauce. We think that life is all of these little things that are arising within our life. We think that it is how attractive or

unattractive we are, our job, our family, our lovers and friends and enemies. But all those things are only arising within our life; none of them are truly our life. If one of those things changes, leaves, or something new and unexpected happens, we even feel as if our life is threatened; however, our life cannot be threatened by that which is arising within it.

We think that our thoughts and feelings are inherent to us, that they define us, but our thoughts and feelings are always coming and going and changing. We think that we are our personal histories, which really means we are our past, but in this moment, where is the past? In this moment there is only this moment. Memories arise within this moment. To act out the past, to act out our memories and habits by rote, is quite all right but somehow it doesn't really work. You are welcome to do that but because you are not living your life as it is, it doesn't quite fit. Nothing fits, everything is broken and fragmented, and so we are left with just hoping that it will all work out somehow if we can just perform that pattern more effectively. Which means, of course, that it just gets worse and worse.

Then, of course, the real question we have to ask ourselves if we want to know this life and live it joyfully is: This body, this mind, this sex, this age, this height, these thoughts and feelings... What is it that is aware of all this?

Although we tend to think that we are our thoughts and feelings, or at least act as if we do, the thoughts and feelings cannot be who we truly are because there is an awareness of them. They are arising and falling within our experience, are arising and falling within Awareness. The colours and forms that we see and touch arise within Awareness. Our waking, sleeping, and dreaming arise within Awareness, our cars and houses, our shoes with holes in them arise within Awareness. Everything that we

experience arises within Awareness.

None of the things that arise within Awareness are what Awareness in itself is. Our life is just this vast Awareness; however, we do not understand this because we think we are the things that we have stuffed into our backpack. The familiar weight of the backpack can sometimes make us feel secure, but sometimes it crushes us. When we hear of something like Zen we might want to do it, for whatever absurd reason, but the chances are of course that we will want to bring along our backpack, because after all without that, what are we left with? Without that what are we?

Zen practice however really begins with putting down the backpack and practising our life as it is. In this Zendo it doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what your gender or sexual orientation is. It doesn't matter how long or short your hair is. It doesn't even matter what you are good at, because you can't do any of those things here. All that you can do is sit and stand and walk and breathe. So it really doesn't matter. We just really don't give a shit who you think you are. And that's a relief, isn't it?

In Zen we simplify things so that we can begin to be straightforward with things. What is it actually like to sit, to breathe, to see a colour, to stand up, to sit down? It doesn't matter whether you like standing up or sitting down. When we stand up, we stand up, when we sit down, we sit down. It doesn't matter how good you are at standing up; you just stand up, that's all.

It doesn't matter what you are thinking about, all of the thoughts are just thoughts, all of the feelings are just feelings. In Zen we are concerned with the process of our experience rather than with merely the contents. We are concerned with the living of this life rather than that which is merely arising within this life. So therefore, there really

is nobody that can be bad at doing this practice. There is nobody that can be particularly good at it either. You just simply do it. We need no other qualifications other than to be alive. In fact, what we have to do is to leave our qualifications behind. Everything that qualifies us, everything that limits us, must be seen into deeply and openly and released.

So, do you see what I mean about how absurd it is to talk about Zen as a path? Because of course, we think that through travelling a path that we are going to get somewhere or going to get something but you *never get anything* from this practice, you just lose everything.

So to practise this path, we have to leave the backpack at the door and just come in and not worry about it; the backpack will still be there when you want to leave. Nobody will steal it. After all, who else would want our little hoard of morose memories and petty complaints? While you are here you simply don't play out any of your states, you don't suppress anything, you don't identify with anything, you don't avoid anything, you don't become anything. You simply attend.

Now, as you are going out and you pick up your backpack at the door, you might notice that it feels much heavier than it did. So, perhaps you can apply your practice outside of formal sitting by beginning to look at what is inside the backpack, and just see what you need and what you don't. In this way you will begin to release a lot of the mannerisms that have defined you as "you." You will realize that these little doo-dads are just not worth taking seriously because they are simply shadows and fragments of the past, while the jewel of this moment, as it is, is always new. This whole moment presents itself as you and as each person that you meet, as each colour that you see and as each sound that you hear.

The thing is of course, it is very difficult for us to leave that backpack at the door. We always want to come into the Zendo and personalize the practice in some kind of way. We want to put a doily on top of the zafu or hang a pair of furry dice on the wall. We want to wander around and just pick at the things that interest us and ignore whatever doesn't. Which means that we want to play out our patterns in our practice. So although we might have left our backpack at the door of the Zendo, we often still stuff our pockets. Or perhaps we have one of those little money belt things hanging over the tanden. We want to smuggle in something.

This is quite interesting. For example, one will hear that "self-image or self grasping is the root of confusion," and so perhaps for a moment we clearly recognize how arrogant that we are. "Oh no, I wouldn't want anybody to see how arrogant I am, that would be awful. Then people won't realize how wonderful and significant I am. So I will not be arrogant any more. I will be humble. I'll be so damn humble, I'll be so gentle, so kindly, I'll have such a sweet smile." This, of course, is just more junk, more old kleenex, coins and lint in your pockets.

Well, if we do not need our backpack to travel the Straight Path, what do we actually need? We need to be alive, and we need to recognize that unless we live our life as it is, there is always something wrong. One of the things we notice when we begin to practise is that it is very difficult for us to do the simplest thing with simplicity. We always have to add something to it. We have to like it or dislike it, we can't just do the thing. We also can't really pay attention that well (laughs). We are continuously getting lost in thoughts and feelings, and you know you are damn lucky if you come back ten or fifteen times during a round of sitting and notice the breath.

And then the Teacher is always talking about things like spaciousness and Awareness itself, releasing the contraction of self-image and all patterns of attention and falling directly into and through and past attention itself. And the weirdest thing is that sometimes that kind of stuff makes sense to us, but when we try to practise it, it becomes very difficult because we fall into those very patterns we are told to fall through. And so we become frustrated; we think that we can't do it, we don't have the qualifications. Well, that is all just more junk and you can leave that outside too.

We find, as well, that it is difficult for us to pay attention without grabbing on to things, so that usually when we try to be mindful of the breath we do that in pretty well the same kind of heavy-handed way in which we get lost in thoughts. We focus on it, we grab on to it. Although we are always being told to just pay attention rather than trying to manipulate our experience, that is all that we really know how to do: grab at little bits and pieces of things.

Now, isn't this interesting? You are aware of a sight, then you are aware of a sound, then you are aware of a thought. You witness self-image as a continual pattern of contraction. You hold on to something, and during the time that you are holding on to this one thing you are excluding everything else, but your life is everything else. Life is the vastness of all of these colours and forms and sounds and thoughts and events arising right now and yet you are aware only of bits and pieces of it. Obviously then, self-image does not know how to live; it is not able to live this life. Life is colours and forms and sounds, breath, thoughts, feelings, all arising simultaneously as the vast display of this moment. And yet you are only aware of bits and pieces of it.

If that were necessary, that would mean that you would not be able to live your life. That would mean that you are somehow so fundamentally flawed that you are not able to live your life. But there is no fundamental flaw. There is nothing wrong with you at all. You, in your own nature, are unconditional freedom and clarity. There is simply this deeply rooted habit of contraction which we call self-image that obviously does not work. It is not the way to live. This is obvious because you are not happy. You are not happy because you are always too busy looking for something outside of you that will make you happy to recognize and live the richness and joyfulness of your life itself. If you can't just feel without adding reactivity to it, if you can't be aware of seeing and hearing and touching and listening and smelling and thinking and feeling as this whole moment of experience, it is simply because there is this pattern of grasping and holding on. This "holding on" is what I mean by self-image. Self-image does not work, it is not able to do the job.

Let's review now to see if you are still with me. We don't need the backpack, we don't need our qualifications, we don't need self-image. What do we need then to practise the path of Zen? First of all, we need to have a Teacher. We need to have somebody who knows the path, somebody who has realized what Awareness in itself is. We also have to have other people who are going through the same kinds of things as we are, because we help each other by irritating each other all the time, and this helps keep things tender and fresh, it helps us to see our patterns. This is called the "Sangha" which means the "community of harmony." As well as irritating us, we sometimes see someone going around in the kinhin line who is obviously having a really bad time. Then the next time you watch them going around the kinhin line, they have a big smile

on their face. That shows you that you are not the only one going up and down on the roller coaster of birth and death, that things change and that things are workable. In this way the Sangha inspires each other because we realize that our own situation is not unique but is simply part of the process of stepping past our conditionality.

So we need a Teacher and we need a Sangha, but then we try to turn those things into qualifications too. The Teacher says something and we believe it. Why? None of our thoughts and feelings, none of our little descriptions and stories are really true, so we can't use our limited understanding to understand the vastness of Awareness itself, the vastness of practice. But we can't use the Teacher's stories and words either, we can't hold on to them; all that we can do is see if they are true. If they are true they are true, and if they are not they are not.

So the reason why we need a Teacher, the reason why we need a Sangha, the reason why we need a practice, is to use them, not to "have" them. Because the whole point of practice is realization. The whole point of the Dharma is to put the Dharma to work for you in your life so that you can apply it.

The Straight Path begins nowhere and ends nowhere, but you could also say that it begins and ends with each breath because each breath is different. Only we can travel this Straight Path, no one can practise it for us. Yet we cannot just practise on our own terms. We always have to go on beyond our own limited views and that is what a Teacher is for; but we cannot just adopt the Teacher's views. What we need to do is to see clearly.

The Straight Path is very narrow at first; there is not room for very much. When you get lost in a thought you have to bring yourself right back. When you notice that you are getting yourself into a state, you have to bring

yourself right back. Sometimes you are mindful and sometimes you are not. The Straight Path is like a tightrope in that sense, walking one foot in front of the other with no room at all to be off even by an inch. But the funny thing is that the more we travel the Straight Path, the broader it becomes. We begin to see that it includes more and more. As we tread the tightrope it broadens beneath our feet, first into a ribbon, then a sidewalk, then a highway, then the surface of the earth, then a place which is no place because it embraces all places.

We then begin to truly see that everything is our practice because everything is arising within Awareness itself, and that is why we do not have to believe anything that the Teacher tells us. Instead we begin to realize that the Teacher was just gesturing to get us to look and see what our own experience is, rather than trying to give us anything.

A Zen Teacher simply acts as a spokesperson for Awareness itself. And that is what we each are. We are each Awareness itself because the thoughts and feelings, the forms, the colours, the states, feeling good, feeling bad, waking, sleeping, dreaming are all arising within Awareness. If we are anything at all, that is what we are.

As the Straight Path becomes broader and broader we begin to realize that the Straight Path is a door, and that it is an open door. When we begin to enter into that open door then we practise the Direct Path, and perhaps we will speak a little about that on Sunday.

Is there anything that we would like to talk about right now? (silence).

No questions. If this is the silence of Vimalakirti which displays the nondual Dharma, then it is wonderful. If not, then you are just hesitating.

Yes.

Question: If we are Awareness, how come we rarely realize it or even get a glimpse of it?

Roshi: Because we think that we are Awareness of “something,” because our intelligence continuously gets lost in what we are being intelligent about. Because Awareness is so vast and all potentials and possibilities arise within it and one of the possibilities is not knowing who we are, being fundamentally confused about our experience, what the mind is, what the body is, what thoughts are, what feelings are, what states are.

Question: Does self-image simply arise? I mean I was born and I just ended up this way. I don’t know, I don’t think I really had anything to do with it. It’s just the way it is.

Roshi: Well, it is certainly not anybody’s fault. It is not your fault, it is not your parents’ fault, but it is a process of closing down more and more that continues and deepens as we live our lives based upon it. For one thing, as a child we are growing, we are opening up more and more, we are learning more and more things, but at the same time a lot of the things that we are learning is how to close down.

When we are children we begin to ask questions. Almost as soon as we can talk we are asking questions, like why is the sky blue? What’s going on? Who am I really? When I walk out of the room, is the room still there? (Roshi laughs). And so on and so forth. We have all these questions about things, but we are told that these are really stupid questions.

Question: I find sometimes, that when I am sitting here, I get so lost in thinking about what or where Awareness is I don’t know where it is anymore and that’s... (Roshi interrupts with a burst of laughter and the student laughs also.)

It's not anywhere, I don't know!

Roshi: Well, the point is to realize Awareness by being aware rather than wondering and speculating about what Awareness in itself is.

Question: I know, but as silly as it is, that's what went through my mind.

Roshi: Well, we become more and more aware by seeing all of the ways in which we are unaware, seeing all of the ways in which we get lost in thoughts and states and so on and so forth, seeing all the knots we tie ourselves up into. Then we begin to see that none of those knots are necessary and beginning to just let go of the knots we find that the knots just fall open. Then we become more and more aware and instead of just getting lost in the thoughts and feelings, we begin to see thinking and feeling as a process rather than being simply absorbed in the content, and proud of or horrified by the content of our thoughts and feelings.

We are actually observing the process and then we begin to observe the process of seeing and hearing and the process of being aware and alive moment after moment and through that we begin to see that we are obviously not any of the things we are aware of. Awareness is not defined by anything that is arising within it, just as a mirror is not defined by anything that is shown on its face, and so in the same way Awareness is not defined by anything that it is aware of. Through simply becoming more and more aware we become less and less absorbed in any of the things we are aware of until we realize that we really are not anything after all.

Awareness is not a thing. Awareness is not a state. Awareness is not an object.

Question: So one is just simply aware.

Roshi: Something like that.

Question: I just keep sitting!?!

Roshi: And even after you realize that, you keep sitting. Because every time we think that we realize something, it simply shows us more that we need to actually apply moment after moment, right?

Question: Okay. I don't know, I have no idea what the time is. Am I allowed to ask another question?

Roshi: Of course you are.

Question: Okay. Is there an end to the path at all, because...

Roshi: No, no, no, not at all! (student laughs). In Zen we say that the Buddha is only halfway there. We talk about First Daikensho...Well, first of all we are talking about Awareness, blah, blah, blah, we have to try to tell you what to do you know, the Direct Path, blah, blah, blah and so we have to talk about kensho and these kinds of things.

As we practise, and as we practise more intensively, as we expose ourselves more and more to our experience as it really is, then we have what are called openings, having some sort of glimpse of what Awareness is, some sense of being aware. Sometimes we get little glimpses of that when we are confused about what the Teacher is saying because all of a sudden something sort of makes sense to us, wow! We realize it makes sense to us, not because we are convinced by it or because it sounds good or anything of this nature, there is something in us that

says, Ahuu! And it is like we have been caught (laughs) caught halfway through our little game, pretending that we are not Awareness. And then sometimes as our practice deepens we have openings for perhaps more than just a moment, we have Ahuuuuuu! Some sort of real glimpse of that, and then we have what are sometimes called “kensho,” a seeing into one’s own nature and actually living as Awareness itself for more than just a moment but perhaps for days or weeks. But then it begins to fade because we still have all kinds of thoughts and feelings that we take too seriously.

Then there is a “Daikensho” which is knowing what Awareness in itself is all the time except when you go to sleep. Then there is Second Daikensho, knowing what Awareness in itself is continually (whether you are waking, sleeping, or dreaming) so that you don’t experience any change of state whatsoever. But then, you know, still, why is it that you are aware of anything at all?

What is really going on here, what are the things that you are apparently aware of, like dreams, like rooms, like people? So Third Daikensho is beginning to understand how Awareness presents itself as what one is aware of. Fourth Daikensho is not being convinced by anything any more, so we call that shattering the mirror.

Now this sounds, I don’t know, it can sound like a lot of work, a lot to do. What else could you do after that? Well, there is a great deal more to do. It is just really difficult for us to talk about any of it because after Fourth Daikensho we have no possibility of further reference points and so we can only talk about the nameless and signless wisdom. Our teaching is in fact that it is at that point that practice really starts.

It does not sound as if there is anything that the Buddha would have to do after waking up, but still

experience is so wonderful, so vast, Awareness itself is so incredibly rich, that there is always more to uncover, more to penetrate, more to pass through.

And so this is why it is so important for us to realize that nothing that arises in our practice can act as an obstacle or be a goal. Sometimes we sit and we want to just feel good and so we begin to feel a little bit calm, or something of this nature. All of this is nice but as soon as we start to do that we then get lost in thought or we fall into sinking mind... so on and so forth.

Perhaps you might have some kind of opening or kensho and think, "This is it, this is it, I've realized everything, everyone else doing this practice just hasn't got it yet. I know more than the Buddha. I know this more than..." and so on. Then we might go off and start up our own little cult or something, but after a while we find that we are completely lost in our thoughts and feelings. And if we have created this cult and set ourselves up as someone who really knows what's going on, we can't afford to admit to anybody that we are lost in thoughts and feelings anymore. This is an extreme example but we all do something very similar whenever we take ourselves too seriously and want to take some little experience that we might have and use it as a credential.

It is very easy for us to get sidetracked because we are so lazy. But this laziness cheats us of our own richness. This is why I say that Zen practice never gives you anything; it is continually giving you so many things that if you tried to hold on to them you would be crushed under the weight. Just don't hold on, just pay attention.

Well perhaps we will just sit for a while now.

Is there anything else that anybody really needs to talk about?

(silence)

Good, thank you.

Snowing on the Straight Path

Through the dark of the night, snow falls. Each snowflake follows a ragged and turning path, but sooner or later it touches the ground.

You get lost in thought and expectations and reactivities but at some moment you bring yourself back to this moment. Bringing yourself back to this moment is itself following the Straight Path. The Straight Path is mindfulness of body, mindfulness of reactivity, mindfulness of mind, mindfulness of mental factors.

The Straight Path is observing one's experience to be the activity of dhammas, or moments of knowing, rising and falling. A sight, a sound, a feeling in the knee and the ankle, the sensation of the breath coming and going, moments of reactivity and how those register as thoughts, and what happens to the tactile sensation that is being reacted against. What happens to the seeing and hearing when attention falls into liking and disliking. Paying attention to the process of experience as a moment after moment arising within this moment, paying attention to experience arising through and as the bodymind, is the Straight Path.

A fresh snowfall covers the ground in a fine powder. There is something very beautiful about freshly fallen snow, but as the snow lies there it begins to pack down. The weather changes, the snow melts a little, becomes cold and freezes, cars drive through it and turn it into a grey pulpy mass. Although the snow was very beautiful when it was fresh, as it becomes old and stale and used it becomes slippery, becomes harsh, very difficult to walk on, you keep losing your balance and falling over.

When a thought arises, just in the moment of the arising, everything is fine, everything is fresh; but as the

thought begins to settle in, as we begin to hold on to it, as we begin to reach out for another thought to pile on top of it, then another thought, and another, things start to become denser and heavier. The more seriously that we take ourselves, the more that we feel that we are dependent on our thoughts and feelings, the less that our thoughts and feelings really add anything useful to our lives, the less freshness that they can bring.

Still, they can bring a kind of freshness. You look into a cold clear winter's day, you see the blue shadows cast on the snow, the glimmering of light caught on individual snowflakes. You say to yourself, "This is beautiful"; so a feeling or a thought can be an enriching aspect of our experience. We are able to think, we are able to feel, and there is nothing wrong at all with thinking and feeling.

The problem is, the more that we think, the less that we tend to be able to think very well. The more dependent that we become on our thoughts, the more that we need to tell ourselves stories about our experience rather than directly experiencing our experience. The more dependent we become on our thoughts, the more that our thoughts and feelings begin to impoverish our lives because we start to become distant from the vibrancy, the dignity, the clarity, the unobstructedness of life itself.

We begin to play out patterns of the past because without a particular kind of thought, a particular kind of feeling, without acting a particular way in a certain situation, we feel confused. Then something is definitely going wrong. When we don't realize that our thoughts and feelings are arising on this Straight Path, that is to say that they arise in this moment, we lose our balance. We slip and slide, we struggle to try and maintain our balance and so we throw our weight the other way. We feel good and then we feel bad; we go back and forth, hoping that if we keep

lurching around like that it will all work out, but all that happens is that we just keep landing on our can.

Well, when we land on our can, why don't we just sit there? Just sit there for a moment and see what is going on; give up lurching back and forth for a moment. Can you just stay right where you are right now, not by holding on to anything to anchor yourself but by just opening to what you are presently experiencing? A thought might be present but if you don't hold on to the thought, if you don't invest yourself in the thought, then it goes quite naturally. A feeling comes up; see that if you take the feeling seriously, you try to explain to yourself why you have a particular feeling and then start to invent all sorts of stories, place the blame or the credit here, there. Then you no longer understand the actual feeling of the feeling, you only have an interpretation, and the feeling builds and becomes dense and heavy with the weight of thoughts that are only an after-effect of the feeling.

When a feeling comes up, can you just feel it?

Feel it with the fingertips, feel it with the breath, feel it with the whole body by simply being present in this moment and you will see that there is truly nothing dense or heavy about a feeling or about a thought. There is simply a play of energy coming and going. We have all kinds of closed circuits that we have brought into the energy system of body, breath, speech, and mind. The loops just play themselves out over and over and over again. Therefore, it is very necessary for us to disconnect those loops. This can sometimes seem to take a great deal of effort but that is only because so much effort has been invested in the loop that to go against that investment seems very difficult.

Instead of struggling against contraction and simply increasing the contraction, can we simply attend to the

contraction as openly as is possible? And can we use the feeling of the contraction itself, the feeling of how much energy that state has, to enquire into the state?

What I mean is this: If there is a quality of obsession perhaps, one is projecting about the future, one is blaming oneself for something in the past, one is feeling guilty, one is feeling angry, one is anxious, one is lonely, there is sadness or fear. Can you feel it without getting into any of the stories? Can you just feel it? Where do you feel it? Where in the body do you feel it first of all? When you feel that, can you feel the rest of the body? Can you feel the whole body, can you feel the breath, can you feel how the breath comes and goes?

So first of all, where in the body is that feeling felt? And now, where in the mind is the feeling? Is the mind in the body or is the body in the mind? Of course you are aware of the world through and with the body, so is the mind inside or outside the body, or do neither of those categories apply?

The Direct Path

The Straight Path becomes the Direct Path when we begin to give up any kind of categorization of our experience and begin to practise from experience itself. What is the body? What is it that is felt as the body? What is it that is seeing and hearing? And what is it that is aware of this?

Practising in this kind of way means that each moment becomes a doorway. There is a sense of continually entering a greater and greater depth of space. The doorway that frames the entry is simply a moment of contraction that is being passed through.

In the Direct Path there is absolutely nowhere to go,

there is nothing to do, there is nothing to struggle against, there is nothing to attain because there are no objects since it is continually going beyond reference points. No reference points can be applied to it.

Travelling the Straight Path means practising mindfulness, paying attention to what you are experiencing. Mindfulness, then, is bringing attention back from wherever it has been lost, from whatever pattern it has fallen into, and bringing it back to attend more openly, more completely. As you do this, what you are experiencing becomes clearer. A sound has a brightness to it, feeling a step has a quality of energy and dignity to it. You simply begin to enjoy your experience more and more. But still, this is only clarifying what you are experiencing, so at some point as we continue our practice (and at various points you will get glimpses of this here and there), we can begin to go beyond mindfulness into directly attending to the process of experiencing.

When one is directly attending in this kind of way, there is no need to apply mindfulness. Instead one finds that mindfulness is spontaneously present as experiences rise and fall. So therefore, there is no heavy-handedness; there is a kind of ease to it, but it is an ease that comes only through being very ruthless and very humorous, that is to say, not taking oneself seriously at all. You don't fall for any of your stories, or any of your lies, yet you don't have to fight against them either because they are so ludicrous.

It is so ludicrous to be living out the past when you are only alive now. It is so bizarre to think that you are defined by your thoughts and feelings. Thoughts and feelings are simply patterns rising and falling and there is an Awareness of them. And Awareness can never be defined, or stained, or contained by anything arising within it. You begin to realize how insane it is to believe

that you can be bound by anything, so therefore you find that there is no need to struggle. That is what I mean by ruthlessness and humour.

When these momentary glimpses of being able to attend directly begin to open and become more and more continuous within your practice, then the process of how experience presents itself will also start to become clearer. For example, at one moment you are aware of a twinge in the ankle, and then an itch in the nostril, and then a sound; attention is skipping from one sensation or perception to the next and then to the next. You are aware of one thing then you are aware of something else.

What are you aware of in between? How is it that you are aware of one thing and then aware of something else? What is the shift? What is present there? How is it that attention can do that? What is it that you are really attending to?

When that moment of “shift” starts to become seen or experienced or felt or listened to and opened into, then we can call this attentiveness. This is a very radical element of practice because there is no way that you can identify with it as your mind, there is no way in which you can own this. Then, when attentiveness becomes more and more continuous, we call this direct insight.

Within direct insight, when we start to be able to open to that shift and attend to the arising of experience from the point of view of that which is between experiences, we begin to realize that experiences are arising within that betweenness, arising within that Zero Point. And this is called prajna or radical insight. This is the Direct Path. It is important for us to understand that the Direct Path is simply an opening and a broadening of the Straight Path. The Straight Path is available to you with each step with each breath and the more fully and

completely you travel the Straight Path, the more that you begin to enter into the Direct Path. The direct and radical quality of the Direct Path is available to you at any point in your practice.

I have a little poem here that speaks about elements of the Direct Path within the Straight Path:

Tourist's Guide to Zazen: One Easy Step

People run this way and that,
looking for good things to see,
trying to avoid anything ugly.

Since they are so afraid of anything ugly
they carry this fear around with them
and everything they see is ugly.

What are you looking for?
What is it that you see?
What is it that sees?

Give up the game of good and bad,
happy and sad,
and just see what is seen,
just hear what is heard,
just sense what is sensed,
just know what is known.
I'm no tour guide.
I have no holiday package to offer.
But if you want to come along with me
I'll show you what I've seen.
First of all, before we start,
you should know that
wherever you are

is always right here.

Each place
is the same place.

No, I'm not kidding.
Although it might seem like a funny thing.

Actually, it's a funny thing
that you have never noticed it.

Oh, something else:
each place
is nowhere at all
because all places are here
and "here"
is not really a place.

Here is just
being aware.

I see you're confused.
Well, before we go on
perhaps we should just sit down.

Let's sit down
right here
in the midst of everything.

Just sit up straight
and pay attention
and just be aware of
being right here.

Pay attention
not just with your mind
(because, after all,
it's the mind that's confused;
the rest is all right).

Pay attention
with your back,
your belly, your breath.

Ears over the shoulder,
nose over the navel;
body in balance
will bring the mind around right.

That's right.

After all,
since the mind
is always running around

and the body is always
right here, right now,

if you want to understand
how each place is the same place
and that each place
is no place,

right here
is the place to start.

Oh, didn't I mention it?
Our tour has begun.

The Zero Point

Perhaps another way that we might broaden our understanding of the Straight Path would be for us to think of it as a circle.

Start with the open clarity of Awareness itself and then complicate it: say, "I." Now "I" is just a little wisp of a thing. It might be blown away very easily, and so you have to anchor it down a bit, and so you fill it out a bit by extending it and say, "I am." But that is still a little vague, a little uncertain, so you need a little bit more weight and you say, "I am...feeling..." This qualifies the "I" a little more but it still doesn't quite do it. Feeling what? "I am feeling... happy!" You add some kind of feeling that you can identify with. Well, happy about what? So you have to say, "I am happy about... blah blah blah blah blah." You add thoughts to the feelings to give it all some content.

When we are distracted through focusing on the blah blah blah, focusing on the content of our states, the little stories that we tell ourselves, we do not actually see the process by which we distance ourselves from ourselves. We are so focused on the content that we do not actually know just what the quality of the feeling is, let alone know what it is, truly, that is feeling it. We even distance ourselves so thoroughly from ourselves that we think that we are the contents of our stories (which would not be so bad if they were interesting stories but unfortunately they are not; they are tawdry, petty little things that just go on and on and on).

This "I" is such a wispy little thing, it is so ephemeral that it has no true existence whatsoever, and so in order to maintain it we cannot afford to look at the process by which the illusion occurs. It is like a good magic trick. In order for it to be entertaining you do not really want to

know how you are being tricked. And so the sleight of hand of self-image always directs attention away from the process of experience and focuses on little bits and pieces of experience taken out of context.

We begin with open Awareness, we add a contraction, a holding on, and then with this pattern of contraction we build ourselves and we build our world. Basically then, self-image has only one moving part: contracting, grasping, holding on. And because self-image is always trying to hold on, there is always a sense of anxiety, because everything is always getting out of hand. Nothing can truly be held, thoughts and feelings rise and fall, sounds come and go, marriages break up, people are born and people die, civilizations rise and fall. You feel good. You feel bad.

And because you are living out a presumption of separation, every area of your life is fragmented and then hastily glued together to create a sense of continuity. One is continually trying to defend this ghost-like "I." Someone says something and one takes it as an attack and all of one's defences come to bear. Someone looks at you in the wrong way, someone does not fulfill your expectations, someone expects too much of you and on and on and on.

The Straight Path is a circle in that, in order to get back to Awareness itself, in order to return to where we started from, we have to make our way through all of the things we have used to separate ourselves from Awareness itself, from experience itself. We have to sit and observe our habitual patterns, we have to look our tawdry little stories right in the face and begin to realize just how meaningless they are.

So when I say that we have to go through all of the things that we have used to separate ourselves from Awareness, I do not mean that we have to pay for our sins.

I do not mean that we have to suffer for having separated ourselves in such a way. The separation itself is already suffering (dukkha). Instead we must simply sit with it, we must observe it openly.

Another way to talk about the Straight Path is to talk of it as a spiral. At any point within our practice, whether we are just beginning our practice or practice is mature and deep, we are working with the same thing (body, breath, speech, and mind) but working with them from different angles.

Actually, of course, the Straight Path is not a circle, is not a spiral, is not a square, is not a line. It is a point! But it is a pointless point. It is a dimensionless point. It is the Zero Point of this moment in which everything is coming and going simultaneously.

As a thought arises, it goes. As a sound is heard, it goes. As this moment *displays* itself as present experience, this present experience immediately becomes past. This moment has no width, no weight, no density whatsoever.

This moment of present experience has no dimension whatsoever because all places take place within it. The pointless point is just this moment of being aware. And by being aware of this moment, of this moment and as this moment, we do not need to talk about the Straight Path anymore. We do not need to talk about the Direct Path any more because we embody the path, because we realize this body and the body of all beings to be arising within the Dharmakaya: the body or realm of reality itself. We are just that. And that is a silence so great that it includes all sounds within itself, it includes all sights within itself. It includes all realms, all experiences, all states, but it is not any of them. It stands always free.

Please, enjoy yourselves.

FUKANZAZENGI: THE EXERTION OF EMPTINESS

from a teisho
(February 14th 1988, Daijōzan)

Good morning.

This morning in teisho I am going to pick up, once again, a few phrases from the **Fukanzazengi** or “**How Everyone Can Sit**” by Dogen zenji.

I can’t even really remember how many times that I have picked up this text before in teisho or how many times I have read and studied it; and yet, each time that I do, it is always fresh and I am always amazed. This is so because the practice that is taught in this text is always fresh. This mind, this moment, are always fresh. This mind and this moment are the root of practice and the **Fukanzazengi** is Dogen’s presentation of the root matters of practice. Due to this, there is an inexhaustible quality to the **Fukanzazengi**, just as our practice can never be plumbed to its depths, just as our practice is always on-going and opening to further unfoldment of this moment, of this mind.

In this text, Dogen zenji discusses what might seem to be essentially basic matters of practice: the posture, what sort of cushions to use. And yet the text is also essential in that he presents the essence of mind itself.

This was one of the first of many texts that Dogen zenji composed. He wrote this soon after his return from China where he had received the Way from Rujing at Tiantongshan monastery. He returned to Japan and was staying in Kyoto and wrote this text when he was around 27 years old.

Fukanzazengi means “**How Everyone Can Sit**” but

we usually find it translated as something like “**Universal Instructions On Practice.**” The title expresses Dogen’s deep feeling that the simple practice of zazen was the universal means for anyone, monk or layperson, young or old, man or woman, to realize freedom. At a time when the Buddhadharma was presented primarily as a collection of techniques and mythologies intended to develop greater wisdom and compassion in its devotees, Dogen felt that no one need have anything added to them. He felt that wisdom and compassion are not foreign objects to be installed on the surface of our lives but are the deep currents that move our lives and that zazen was the most immediate and direct way for us to release the strategies and fabrications that obstruct the exertion of this flow. As he had realized for himself that all beings are inherently awake and free in their own natures he wrote this text as an easy introduction to the simplest of all practices: being aware.

Dogen begins by telling us that:

The way is in essence perfect and pervades everywhere.

The Way, the Tao, is the inherent perfection and spontaneous presencing of all that is. It is not a path to be followed by anyone to anywhere; it is a journey of unfolding the ever-fresh potentiality of reality. The Way is not religious, philosophical, spiritual or commercial. It is not just found in this Zendo, not just on the street, not just in the trees or the sky. It is not outside of you. It is not within you. You are within it. It is not behind you, above you, or below you. It presents itself as the knowing of this thought, this breath, this mind. The arising of this mind, the arising of this moment is the experience of the Way.

The Way of the Buddhas, the Way of Awakening, is simply waking up to the vast clarity of the nature of

Experience itself. It is simply uncovering who this is, what this is, what this world is. You look at the wall and there is the world. You look at the sky and there is the world. You walk on the street and there is the world, pervading everywhere.

The Original Nature, ultimate reality, the essence of mind itself, presents itself in and as each moment; it is not something that can be created through practising, it is not something fabricated through concept.

Perfect wisdom, perfect compassion, perfect freedom and liberation from the circular round of birth and death, from the cocoon of habit and concept, is also not dependent upon practice; it is dependent only on the nature of reality itself. It is simply who this is. If it could be fabricated through practising, it could be taken away. All beings are nothing other than the realm of unconditioned freedom.

So why do we practise?

Practice is the expression and the actualization of who this is. It is uncovering completely and radically the essenceless essence of this very bodymind; it is also uncovering all of the ways in which we try to cover up, all of the ways in which we try to maintain the fantasies and denials, the hopes and fears, the fabrications of self-image. Practice is the moment to moment realization of the radically free and unobstructed nature of this moment.

It is never separate from where you are, so why scramble around in search of it? The thing is, if there is the slightest gap, sky and earth are ripped apart.

The Way is always the Way, no matter what you do or don't do about it. Whether you practise or don't, Buddha is still Buddha. All beings, all dharmas are always only the play of Luminosity, the arising, dwelling and

decaying of Experience, the exertion of emptiness, whether you realize it or not. But if you do not realize it, heaven and earth are ripped apart. You drive a wedge between yourselves and others. You suffer. You create suffering for yourselves and for others.

From this sheer and open Luminosity you fabricate a body, you fabricate a mind, you fabricate time and space; you fabricate anger, passion, boredom, frustration and strategy. Through this you identify yourself with the thoughts and feelings that are actually arising simply as the exertion of emptiness, simply as the play of Luminosity.

If you give rise to even a flicker of like and dislike, you lose your mind.

When you fixate, you get stuck and you get lost. And so we practise to uncover the nature of this mind itself, this body itself, the nature of Experiencing itself. At the moment of hearing these sounds, what is this listening?

The Way expresses itself in all sounds. The sounds of the birds, the sounds of this voice, the sound of a snowflake settling on a branch. It is all sights and the seeing. Breathing in, breathing out. Who is this? Who is it that dreams, that wakes up in the morning? Who is it that experiences anything at all?

As we continue to practise, we continue to uncover more and more layers of strategy and we release them. Not only our confusion, but also every realization that arises within practice, can be a place of sticking, can be a wedge that we can drive in between heaven and earth to keep them apart. Every time that clarity arises, if we grasp at it, we have lost the Way. The Way itself can never be lost but we have lost the Way.

The Way always knows where it is because each place

and each moment arise as its unfolding within knowing, but if we do not know this then we do not understand where everything is really taking place. When our practice is difficult and frustration arises, if we do not realize that it is this very frustration that must be questioned into and that the feeling that we can't question is what must be questioned into, then we have lost the Way.

But the Way pervades everywhere and in losing the Way we can always find the Way because it is always right here. By simply seeing what is arising, dwelling and decaying within Experiencing we can question into and realize the nature of Experiencing itself. But this questioning must be completely without limits, completely without boundaries, completely without any settling. Leave no stone unturned.

Uncovering and actualizing is the essence of practice. This means attending to this moment and realizing the nature of this attending, of attention itself. Experiences arise as the disposition of attention. Attention is the essence of this bodymind and of the realm of experiencing. What is the activity of attention? This is what we uncover and actualize.

And so we sit, walk, talk, listen to teisho, go to work, have babies, die, do all the things that we do, questioning into, uncovering and realizing who it is that does these things.

Dogen zenji says,

In this and in all other worlds, in India or in China, the buddha seal holds everywhere.

The seal of enlightenment marks all experiences and all experiences are like marks left by the seal of Awareness. Good, bad, pleasant, unpleasant, sleeping, waking, all arise within Awareness itself. What is this Awareness?

Dogen zenji says,
Think of not-thinking. How do you think of not-thinking?
Be before thinking. These are the basics of zazen.

This means: No opposites. Zen is not a matter of thinking (*shiryo*) or of shutting out thought (*fushiryo*) but of being Before Thinking (*hishiryo*). Before Thinking means to be prior to experiences in the same way that a mirror is always prior to what it shows even at the moment of showing it. We cannot be anything that we are aware of. We are always the context of whatever content arises. When we release all of our states and our avoidance and identification then we are always right there at the very moment that the world arises, right at this pointless point. Bring together every aspect of mind, everything hidden and everything obvious, and allow each to resolve itself into the knowing of it. This is zazen, the shikantaza of all awakened ones.

Confusion arises, sleepiness arises, frustration arises, and Dogen zenji says,

Understand that the true dharma displays itself here, and then dullness and mental wandering have no place to arise.

In this world of formless forms what can be attained? What can be held on to? This thought? This feeling? What will you hold on to it with? It's already gone. "*Understand that the true dharma displays itself here and then dullness and mental wandering have no place to arise.*" Whether you are confused or realized, both are the play of Luminosity, the exertion of emptiness.

Dogen zenji says,

Since this is as it is, it doesn't matter if you're clever or

stupid; the distinction distinguishes nothing. Whole-hearted practice is the way. Since realized-practice cannot be stained, progress into the ordinary.

When hope or fear arise in our practice and we are facing that which we really do not want to face — that memory, that thought, that pattern of reactivity — when unconditional fear arises as we begin to open the primal forms of the grasping of self-image and the flames of anger close in on us and the cold steel blade of paranoia slides into our underbellies, when tremors of joy flush our chest and faces, when a song is riding on endlessly through the sitting period and then through kinhin, then into the next sitting period... Nothing is stained... nothing is stained. Nothing that a mirror shows can stain it, no matter how beautiful or grotesque the reflection might be.

Practise in this way and realize this moment in your practice. Do not look for any other moment in which to realize your own nature. Practise it now, realize it now. What is this? These sounds? This breath? Who is it asking the question? Who? Behind all these faces, what is the Original Face? What is this thumb, this mouth, this “Who,” this breath? Open into the purity of this moment in which nothing can be stained. Progress into the ordinary.

Usual mind is the pattern of wandering, the pattern of scattering, the pattern of holding, of fabricating; but all this is only second nature. The continual contraction of self-image is the gesture of avoiding the open clarity that is already the case. First nature is the Ordinary Mind of the Buddhas and Dharma Ancestors. Usual mind and self-image are the realm of birth and death. In the mind of the Buddhas and Dharma Ancestors, in the nature of your own mind, there is not one thing, there is no birth, no death; there is just this. And so practise “just this” and enter into

Suchness, things as they are.

True practice is the activity of realization. It is
“realized-practice.”

Dogen zenji says,

*If you wish to realize suchness, immediately practise in
suchness.*

If you wish to realize Awareness, just be aware. If not
now, when? If not here, where?

As my closing words this morning and my best
wishes to you, I join Dogen zenji in saying,

*In this and all other worlds, in India or in China, the
buddha-seal holds everywhere. Upholding the essence of this
way, devote yourself to zazen, completely do zazen. You
might hear about 10,000 ways to practise but just be
complete and sit. What’s the point of giving up your seat
to go wandering around in dusty lands and countries? Take
a wrong step and you’ll miss what’s there.*

*You’ve got what you need, the treasure of this body and
birth, so don’t waste your time. Keep to this as the basis of
the buddhaway. Don’t be attracted by just a spark from the
flint. Anyway, your body is like dew on the grass, your life
a flash of lightning; vain for a moment and then vanished
in an instant.*

*You who are in this excellent Lineage of Zen, don’t
blindly grope only a part of the elephant or fear the true
dragon. Put all of yourself into this Way which directly
presents your own nature. Be grateful to those who have
come before you and have done what was to be done. Align
yourself with the enlightenment of the buddhas and take
your place in this Samadhi Lineage. Practise in this way
and you’ll be what they are. The doors of the treasure house
will fall open for you to do with as you will.*



Appendix:
**The
Satipatthana
Sutta**

**Foundations of
Mindfulness**

A new translation from the Pali
by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi
and Tory Nyujo Cox

EVAM ME SUTAM. Thus have I heard.

Once the Generous One¹⁰ was dwelling amidst the Kurus at Kammasadamma, a market town. There the Generous One addressed the monks, “Monks.” The monks responded, “Yes, sir.”

The Generous One said this:

There is a Straight Path¹¹, monks, for the purity of beings, for stepping past sorrow and crying, the setting of suffering and distress, for finding the right way, for the direct seeing¹² of nibbana,¹³ and that is the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

What are these Four? Right here, monks, one lives completely viewing the body as body, intent, fully understanding and mindful, having released grasping and resentment for the world. One abides, completely viewing the basic reactivity as reactivity, intent, fully understanding and mindful, having released grasping and resentment for the world. One dwells, completely viewing the mind as mind, intent, fully understanding and mindful, having released grasping and resentment for the world. One lives, completely viewing mental states as states, intent, fully understanding and mindful, having released grasping and resentment for the world.

¹⁰ Bhagavan. The original term is “Bhagavant,” one who possesses fortune or who possesses shares, a title one might give to a king or a god, perhaps hoping that he will give out some of his shares. The Buddha, the Awakened One, “possesses” the Teachings through his realization and shares these with others in order to guide their practice. Usually translated as “the Blessed One,” or the “World Honoured One.”

¹¹ Ekayano maggo: “one going road,” a path that goes in one direction, a straight-forward way.

¹² Saccikiriya. The Sanskrit term is “saksatkriya.” “Sa” -with, “aksat” -eye, “kr” -to do, or to make. Literally “putting before the eyes.”

¹³ Sanskrit: “Nirvana.” “Nirva” -blown out, to be allayed, or refreshed, or exhilarated. Delight. “Nirvana” -disappear, released, immersed, replenished.

Body (Kaya)

And how, monks, does someone here view the body as body? Here, monks, one goes into the forest, to the roots of a tree, or to an empty room, sits down cross-legged and holds the body upright, keeping mindfulness present.

Breathing in, one is mindful; breathing out, one is mindful. Breathing out a long breath, one understands, "I breathe out a long breath." Breathing in a long breath, one understands, "I breathe in a long breath." Breathing out a short breath, one understands, "I breathe out a short breath." Breathing in a short breath, one understands, "I breathe in a short breath."

One practises, "I will breathe out with full experience of the whole body." One practises, "I will breathe in with full experience of the whole body." One practises, "I will breathe out, calming the tendencies of the body." One practises, "I will breathe in, calming the tendencies of the body."

Just as a skillful turner¹⁴ or a turner's apprentice, making a long turn knows, "I am making a long turn," or making a short turn knows, "I am making a short turn," just so monks, the monk practises breathing out a long breath knowing, "I breathe out a long breath."

And moreover, monks, in walking one knows "I am walking"; in standing one knows "I am standing"; in sitting one knows "I am sitting"; when lying down one knows "I am lying down." In whatever way the body is held, thus the body is understood.

And further, monks, in going forwards and in going back, complete knowing is realized. In looking ahead and looking behind, complete knowing is realized. Bending and

¹⁴For example, a potter or someone working a lathe.

stretching, complete knowing is realized. Carrying the robes and bowl, complete knowing is realized. In eating and drinking, chewing and tasting, complete knowing is realized. Excreting and urinating, complete knowing is realized. In motion and in stillness, in sitting, in sleeping and waking, in speech and silence, complete knowing is realized.

Thus one lives, completely viewing the body as body internally; one lives, completely viewing the body as body externally. Thus one lives, completely viewing the body as body both internally and externally.

One dwells observing the body as phenomena which arise; one dwells observing the body as phenomena which decay. Thus one dwells, observing the body as phenomena which both arise and decay.

When the mindfulness “this is body” is established, there is just knowing¹⁵ and just mindfulness¹⁶.

Images of the Body

And moreover, monks, upwards from the soles of the feet and downwards from the hair on the crown of the head, one observes the body: covered with skin and filled with impurities.

Within this body there are hairs on the head, hair on the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, muscle, bone, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, bowels, intestines, stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, mucous, synovial fluid and urine. If a double-mouthed sack filled with various grains like paddy, hill-rice, kidney beans, masa beans, sesame and husked rice were to be opened by

¹⁵ Nanamatta: mere knowing.

¹⁶ Pstissatimattaya: mere mindfulness, mindfulness only.

someone he would discern, "This is paddy, this is hill-rice, these are kidney beans, these are masa beans, this is sesame and these are grains of husked rice."

So, monks, if one were to examine this body upwards from the soles and downwards from the hair on the crown, one would discern that on this body are hairs on the head, hair on the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, muscle, bone, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, bowels, intestines, stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, mucous, synovial fluid and urine.

And moreover, monks, one can examine the body wherever it abides, however it is held, in terms of the elements and discern that there is in the body the earth element, the water element, fire element and the air element. Just as a skilled butcher or a butcher's apprentice, after having killed a cow and cutting piece after piece of it would lay it out near the crossroads, so monks, one would examine the body in terms of the elements wherever it abides, however it is held in terms of the elements and discern that there is in the body the earth element, the water element, fire element and the air element.

And moreover, monks, seeing a corpse left in a charnel ground for one or two or three days, bloated, blue and rotting, recollect that, "This body is also of that nature; it will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And, monks, see the body abandoned in a burning ground being eaten by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, and full of small breathing things, and remember that, "This body is also of that nature, it will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And, monks, see the body, abandoned in the charnel ground, a skeleton with blood and meat tied together with tendons and sinews, and remember that, "This body is also of that nature; it will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And, monks, see the body, abandoned in the burning ground, a skeleton bloody and fleshless, tied together with tendons and sinews, and remember that, "This body is also of that nature; it will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And, monks, see the body abandoned in the charnel ground, its bones not bound together but scattered in all directions, here the bones of the hand, there the bones of the foot, here the shin bone, the thigh bone, the hip bone, the spine and the skull, and recollect that, "This body is also of that nature; it will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And, monks, see the body, abandoned in the burning ground, the bones whitened to the colour of shells, and remember that, "This body is also of that nature; it will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And, monks, see the body, abandoned in the charnel ground, the bones in a heap, having weathered a year, and recollect that, "This body is also of that nature; it will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

And, monks, see the body, abandoned in the burning ground, the bones having decayed and crumbled into dust, and remember that, "This body is also of that nature; it will come to this, it cannot avoid this."

Thus one lives, completely viewing the body as body internally; one lives, completely viewing the body as body externally. Thus one lives, completely viewing the body as body both internally and externally.

One dwells observing the body as phenomena which arise; one dwells observing the body as phenomena which decay. Thus one dwells, observing the body as phenomena which both arise and decay.

When the mindfulness "this is body" is established, there is just knowing and just mindfulness.

Basic Reactivity (Vedana)

And how, monks, does one live completely viewing basic reactivity as reactivity? Here, monks, experiencing a good reaction one knows “I am experiencing a good reaction.” Experiencing a bad reaction one knows “I am experiencing a bad reaction.” Experiencing a reaction which is neither good nor bad one knows “I am experiencing a neutral reaction.” Experiencing a bodily¹⁷ reaction which is good, bad or neither, one knows “I experience a pleasant bodily reaction” or “I experience an unpleasant bodily reaction” or “I experience a bodily reaction which is neither.” And so when experiencing mental¹⁸ reactions which are good, bad or neither, one knows “I experience a good mental reaction,” or “I experience a bad mental reaction,” or “I experience a neutral mental reaction.”

Thus one lives, completely viewing reactions as basic reactivity internally; one lives, completely viewing reactions as reactions externally. Thus one lives, completely viewing reactions as reactions both internally and externally.

One dwells observing reactions as phenomena which arise; one dwells observing reactions as phenomena which decay. Thus one dwells, observing reactions as phenomena which both arise and decay. When the mindfulness “this is basic reactivity” is established, there is just knowing and just mindfulness.

¹⁷ Bodily or sensual-samisam: literally “with raw meat.”

¹⁸ Mental or non-sensual -niramisam: literally “not with raw meat.”

Mind (Citta)

And how, monks, does one live, completely viewing mind as mind? Here, monks, one knows the greedy mind as greedy and one knows a mind without greed as without greed. One knows a hating mind as hateful and a mind without hate as without hate. One knows a confused mind as confused and an unconfused mind as without confusion. One knows sinking mind as sinking and a scattered mind as scattered. One knows a mind that is open¹⁹ as open, one knows a mind that is contracted as contracted. One knows a mind that is limited²⁰ as limited and an unlimited²¹ mind as unlimited. One knows a whole mind as whole and a divided mind as divided. One knows a free²² mind as free and an unfree mind as without freedom.

Thus one lives, completely viewing the mind as mind internally; one lives, completely viewing the mind as mind externally. Thus one lives, completely viewing the mind as mind both internally and externally.

One dwells observing the mind as phenomena which arise; one dwells observing the mind as phenomena which decay. Thus one dwells, observing the mind as phenomena which both arise and decay. When the mindfulness “this is mind” is established, there is just knowing and just mindfulness.

¹⁹ Mabagattam: literally “gone to greatness.”

²⁰ Sa uttaram: literally “beneath.”

²¹ Anuttara: literally “none higher.”

²² Vimmutam: free

Mental States (Dhamma)

And how, monks, does one live completely viewing mental states as states?

The Five Coverings (panca-nivarana)

Here, monks, one lives completely viewing the five coverings as mental states. And how, monks, does one live completely viewing the five coverings as mental states.

Here, monks, when there is sensual desire present in oneself, one knows “Here is desire.” When sense-desire is absent, one knows “There is no desire here.” One knows the arising of the absent desire-impulse, one knows the releasing of the arisen desire-impulse, one knows the future non-arising of abandoned desire.

When there is aggression present in oneself, one knows “Here is aggression.” When there is no aggression in oneself, one knows, “There is no aggression here.” One knows the arising of absent aggression, one knows the releasing of aggression, one knows the future non-arising of aggression.

When there is dullness present in oneself, one knows “Here is dullness.” When there is no dullness in oneself, one knows, “There is no dullness here.” One knows the arising of absent dullness, one knows the releasing of dullness, one knows the future non-arising of dullness.

When there is excitement and remorse present in oneself, one knows “Here is excitement and remorse.” When there is no excitement and remorse in oneself, one

knows, “There is no excitement and remorse here.” One knows the arising of absent excitement and remorse, one knows the releasing of excitement and remorse, one knows the future non-arising of excitement and remorse.

When there is hesitation present in oneself, one knows “Here is hesitation.” When there is no hesitation in oneself, one knows, “There is no hesitation here.” One knows the arising of absent hesitation, one knows the releasing of hesitation, one knows the future non-arising of hesitation.

The Five Binding Groups (panca upadanakkhandha)

Moreover, monks, one lives completely viewing the five binding groups as mental states. And how, monks, does one live completely viewing the five binding groups as mental states? Here, monks, this is form, this is the rising of appearance, this is the falling of form. This is reaction, this is the rising of reaction, this is the falling of reaction. This is symbolization, this is the rising of symbolization, this is the falling of symbolization. This is habitual patterning, this is the rising of habitual patterns, this is the falling of habitual patterns. This is consciousness, this is the rising of consciousness, this is the falling of consciousness.

The Six Internal-external Sense-fields (ayatana)

And again, monks, one lives completely viewing the six

internal and external sense-fields as mental states. And how, monks, does one live completely viewing the six subjective and objective sense fields as mental states?

Here, monks, one knows the eye, one knows the visual objects, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both. Here, monks, one knows the ear, one knows the sounds, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both. Here, monks, one knows the nose, one knows the smells, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both. Here, monks, one knows the tongue, one knows the tastes, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both. Here, monks, one knows the body, one knows the tangibles, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both. Here, monks, one knows the mind, one knows the mental objects, one knows the bond which arises dependent on both.

And further, one knows the arising of the absent bond, one knows the releasing of the arisen bond, one knows the future non-arising of the abandoned bond.

The Seven Factors of Awakening (satta bojjhanga)

And again, monks, one lives completely viewing the seven factors of awakening as mental states. And how, monks, does one live completely viewing the seven factors of awakening as mental states?

Here, monks, when the factor of mindfulness is present in oneself one knows “The factor of mindfulness is present.” One knows the arising of the absent factor of mindfulness and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of mindfulness.

Here, monks, when the factor of the investigation

of reality is present in oneself one knows “The factor of the investigation of reality is present.” One knows the arising of the absent factor of investigation and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of investigation of reality.

Here, monks, when the factor of energy is present in oneself one knows “The factor of energy is present.” One knows the arising of the absent factor of energy and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of energy.

Here, monks, when the factor of joy is present in oneself one knows “The factor of joy is present.” One knows the arising of the absent factor of joy and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of joy.

Here, monks, when the factor of calm is present in oneself one knows “The factor of calm is present.” One knows the arising of the absent factor of calm and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of calm.

Here, monks, when the factor of wholeness is present in oneself one knows “The factor of wholeness is present.” One knows the arising of the absent factor of wholeness and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of wholeness.

Here, monks, when the factor of equanimity is present in oneself one knows “The factor of equanimity is present.” One knows the arising of the absent factor of equanimity and one knows the fulfillment of the growth of the factor of equanimity.

The Four Noble Truths **(catur ariya sacca)**

And again, monks, one lives completely viewing the Four Noble Truths as mental states. And how, monks, does one

live completely viewing the Four Noble Truths as mental states? Here, monks, “This is suffering,” thus one knows it as it is, “This is the arising of suffering,” thus one knows it as it is. “This is the ending of suffering,” thus one knows it as it is. “This is the way to the ending of suffering,” thus one knows it as it is.

Thus one lives, completely viewing mental states as states internally; one lives, completely viewing mental states as states externally. Thus one lives, completely viewing mental states as states both internally and externally.

One dwells observing mental states as phenomena which arise; one dwells observing mental states as phenomena which decay. Thus one dwells, observing mental states as phenomena which both arise and decay. When the mindfulness “these are mental states” is established, there is just knowing and just mindfulness.

And if, monks, one practises these Four Foundations of Mindfulness for seven years, one of two desired fruits can be expected: direct insight²³ into present experiencing²⁴, or, if there are still some traces of grasping, the condition of no-returning. Forget the seven years, monks; if one practises these Four Foundations of Mindfulness for six years, for five or four or three or two or even for one year, one of two desired fruits can be expected: direct insight into here and now, or, if there are still some traces of grasping, the condition of no-returning.

Forget the year, monks; if one practises these Four Foundations of Mindfulness for seven months, one of two desired fruits can be expected: direct insight into present experiencing, or, if there are still some traces of grasping, the

²³ Anna (Sanskrit “a” -near, to, towards; “jna” -to mind, perceive, understand). The commentarial literature assumes this means arahantship.

²⁴ Dittha dhamma: that which is being seen.

condition of no-returning. Forget the seven months, monks; if one practises these Four Foundations of Mindfulness for six months, for five or four or three or two or one or even half a month, one of two desired fruits can be expected: direct insight into here and now, or, if there are still some traces of grasping, the condition of no-returning.

Forget the half a month, monks; if one practises the Four Foundations of Mindfulness for seven days, one of two desired fruits can be expected: direct insight into present experiencing, or, if there are still some traces of grasping, the condition of no-returning.

This is why I have said that this is the Straight Path, monks, for the purity of beings, for stepping past sorrow and crying, the setting of suffering and distress, for finding the right way, for the direct seeing of nirvana, and that is the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Thus spoke the Generous One. Their hearts raised, the monks enjoyed this discourse of the Generous One.



*"Zen is the transmission and practice of who we are beyond our names, our genders, our cultural habits. It has been practiced in India, China, Japan, and now is **right here, right now.**"*

— Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi

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